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## PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES.

FIRST SESSION, 1920.

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# EIGHTH PARLIAMENT.

FIRST SESSION.

## Governor-General.\*

His Excellency the Right Honorable HENRY WILLIAM, BARON FORSTER, a Member of His Majesty's Most Honorable Privy Council, Knight Grand Cross of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, and Commander-in-Chief in and over the Commonwealth of Australia.

\* From 6th October, 1920.

## Australian National Government.

(From 10th January, 1918.)

Prime Minister and Attorney-General Minister for the Navy	..	The Right Honorable William Morris Hughes, P.C., K.C.
		.. The Right Honorable Sir Joseph Cook, P.C., G.C.M.G. <i>Succeeded by</i>
Treasurer	..	.. The Honorable W. H. Laird Smith (28th July, 1920).
		.. The Right Honorable Lord Forrest, P.C., G.C.M.G. <i>Succeeded by</i>
Minister for Defence	..	.. The Right Honorable William Alexander Watt, P.C. (27th March, 1918).††††
Minister for Repatriation	..	<i>Succeeded by</i> .. The Right Honorable Sir Joseph Cook, P.C., G.C.M.G. (28th July, 1920).
Minister for Works and Railways	..	.. The Honorable George Foster Pearce.
Minister for Home and Territories	..	.. The Honorable Edward Davis Millen.
Minister for Trade and Customs	..	.. The Right Honorable William Alexander Watt, P.C. <i>Succeeded by</i>
Postmaster-General	..	.. The Honorable Littleton Ernest Groom (27th March, 1918).
Vice-President of the Executive Council	..	.. The Honorable Patrick McMahon Glynn, K.C.††† <i>Succeeded by</i>
Honorary Minister	..	.. The Honorable Alexander Poynton, O.B.E. (4th February, 1920).
Honorary Minister	..	.. The Honorable Jens August Jensen.† <i>Succeeded by</i>
Honorary Minister	..	.. The Right Honorable William Alexander Watt, P.C. (13th December, 1918).
Honorary Minister	..	<i>Succeeded by</i> .. The Honorable Walter Massy Greene (17th January, 1919).
Honorary Minister	..	.. The Honorable William Webster.††† <i>Succeeded by</i>
Honorary Minister	..	.. The Honorable George Henry Wise (4th February, 1920).
Honorary Minister	..	.. The Honorable Littleton Ernest Groom. <i>Succeeded by</i>
Honorary Minister	..	.. The Honorable Edward John Russell (27th March, 1918), The Honorable Edward John Russell.
Honorary Minister	..	.. Appointed Vice-President of the Executive Council, 27th March, 1918.
Honorary Minister	..	.. The Honorable Alexander Poynton.
Honorary Minister	..	.. Appointed Minister for Home and Territories, 4th February, 1920.
Honorary Minister	..	.. The Honorable George Henry Wise.
Honorary Minister	..	.. Appointed Postmaster-General, 4th February, 1920.
Honorary Minister	..	.. The Honorable Walter Massy Greene.
Honorary Minister	..	.. Appointed Minister for Trade and Customs, 17th January, 1919.*
Honorary Minister	..	.. The Honorable Richard Beaumont Orchard.**
Honorary Minister	..	.. The Honorable Sir Granville de Laune Ryrie, K.C.M.G., C.B., V.D.††
Honorary Minister	..	.. The Honorable William Henry Laird Smith.†† Appointed Minister for the Navy, 28th July, 1920.
Honorary Minister	..	.. The Honorable Arthur Stanislaus Rodgers.***

\* Appointed 26th March, 1918.—† Removed from office, 13th December, 1918.—\*\* Resigned office, 31st January, 1919.—†† Appointed 4th February, 1920.—††† Resigned 3rd February, 1920.—†††† Resignation from office gazetted, 15th June, 1920.—\*\*\* Appointed 28th July, 1920.

## Senators.

(From 1st July, 1920.)

President—Senator the Honorable Thomas Givens.

Chairman of Committees—Senator Thomas Jerome Kingston Bakhap.

* Adamson, John, C.B.E. (Q.)	* Glasgow, Sir Thomas William, K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O. (Q.)
Bakhap, Thomas Jerome Kingston (T.)	* Guthrie, James Francis (V.)
* Benny, Benjamin (S.A.)	Guthrie, Robert Storrie (S.A.)
Bolton, William Kinsey, C.B.E., V.D. (V.)	Henderson, George (W.A.)
* Buzacott, Richard (W.A.)	Keating, Hon. John Henry (T.)
* Cox, Charles Frederick, C.B., C.M.G. (N.S.W.)	* Lynch, Patrick Joseph (W.A.)
Crawford, Thomas William (Q.)	Millen, Hon. Edward Davis (N.S.W.)
De Largie, Hon. Hugh (W.A.)	* Millen, John Dunlop (T.)
* Drake-Brockman, Edmund Alfred, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O. (W.A.)	* Newland, John, C.B.E. (S.A.)
* Duncan, Walter Leslie (N.S.W.)	* Payne, Hon. Herbert James Mockford (T.)
Earle, Hon. John (T.)	2 Pearce, Hon. George Foster (W.A.)
* Elliott, Harold Edward, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., D.C.M. (V.)	1 Plain, William (V.)
Fairbairn, George (V.)	Pratten, Herbert Edward (N.S.W.)
Foll, Hattil Spencer (Q.)	Reid, Matthew (Q.)
* Foster, George Matthew (T.)	1 Rowell, James, C.B. (S.A.)
* Gardiner, Albert (N.S.W.)	* Russell, Hon. Edward John (V.)
* Givens, Hon. Thomas (Q.)	Senior, William (S.A.)
	Thomas, Hon. Josiah (N.S.W.)
	* Wilson, Reginald Victor (S.A.)

1. Appointed Temporary Chairman of Committees, 21st July, 1920. 2. Elected 13th December, 1919. Sworn 21st July, 1920. 3. Appointed Temporary Chairman of Committees, 26th February, 1920.

\* Elected 13th December, 1919. Sworn 1st July, 1920.

of this House, if the manufacturers in the Yarra district chose to fight this case in the Courts, I would vote to give them a dose of Free Trade rather than afford them Protection solely for the purpose of enabling them to sweat their employees.

Mr. BLUNDELL.—In carrying out the principle of discriminating between married and single employees there is a likelihood of that discrimination working to the disadvantage of the married man.

Mr. TUDOR.—I presume that each workman's child under fourteen would be registered, and as the employer would be taxed so much for each employee, it would make no difference to him whether his workmen were married or single. My complaint is that this particular matter should have been re-submitted to the whole Basic Wage Commission, and not to the Chairman only. It was unfair to place on him the onus of answering in a few hours all these questions which are so important.

Mr. MAXWELL.—It might be well, even now, to submit Mr. Piddington's memorandum to the full Commission.

Mr. TUDOR.—The Government referred the report of the Inter-State Commission on Meat back to it three times. There are organizations which have been waiting for months, and even years, to get their cases heard by the Arbitration Court. They are prepared to accept the awards of that Court.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—There is nothing in that, because these very men have just got an award from the Court.

Mr. TUDOR.—I am not speaking of the public servants, but of such organizations as the employees in the clothing trade, engine-drivers, gas workers, the amalgamated engineers, the builders' labourers. The other day I introduced a deputation of the last-mentioned to the Prime Minister. Their spokesman said they had been waiting for about four years since they had last secured an award from the Arbitration Court, and now they wanted a more speedy method of obtaining justice. They desired to come within the scope of the Industrial Peace Act, so that they might obtain a direct conference with the employers. As for the public servants, the Prime Minister said some days ago that he was going to make their wage £4 4s. per week. That is a

matter for the Government to decide; but the conditions under which the public servants are working to-day are such as to have created seething discontent. The way in which the best of our public servants are dropping out and seeking better prospects in private spheres of activity constitutes a matter of grave concern. When we see employees in the Public Service dissatisfied, as they are to-day with Mr. Justice Starke's award, and claiming that under it they will be in a worse position than they were eighteen months ago, we must be impressed with the feeling that it is high time the Government considered the whole grave subject.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—That is quite a misrepresentation. The award to which the honorable member has just referred will cost this country £350,000.

Mr. TUDOR.—And the Treasurer will say, I suppose, that that will ruin the country. When, during the discussion of the first Commonwealth Public Service Bill, I moved for the insertion of a clause to provide a minimum wage, the then Treasurer, the late Sir George Turner, said my proposal would ruin the country. This is a country which seems to stand an awful lot of ruin without being any the worse off for it. I now ask for consideration for those who have been waiting for years to secure justice through the Arbitration Court. Is it any wonder that the workers should become more and more restless, and be determined to obtain justice for themselves, when they learn how their toil is piling up enormous profits for the employers, while their share—owing to the ever-receding value of the sovereign—is getting less and less? In the annual report of the Bureau of Commerce and Industry for 1920, there is a return showing total issues authorized in respect of new and existing companies from 26th January, 1916, to 31st December, 1919, together with the purposes for which the issues were authorized. Honorable members will recall that during that period no company could increase its capital, and no new company could be formed without official sanction. During the period in question, the total issue of new capital was more than £111,000,000. Of that, nearly £63,000,000 was subscribed in cash; £12,500,000 was subscribed by

the transfer to capital of reserves and undivided profits; while more than £36,000,000 was subscribed by the transfer of assets other than cash. Honorable members know full well that that last-mentioned total largely represents goodwill. In other words, the £36,000,000 was water, and the workers of Australia had to make profits to provide dividends upon that capital, which really had no existence. Now the Government are trying to rush this House into recess without giving justice to the workers. I, at any rate, shall not permit that course without vigorous protest. I have quoted from the figures of the employers themselves. Let me now turn to the findings of a Nationalist Commission appointed by the late Holman Government in New South Wales to inquire into the enormous profits made by the coal companies of that State. The *Worker*, from which I shall quote, has turned its attention to three typical cases, and the statistics are so interesting that I quote them in full, as follow:—

District.	Year.	Capital Employed in Production.	Tonnage Sold.	Total Profits.	Percentage of Profit on Capital.
		£		£	%
No 1— Southern	1914	28,006	255,481	12,006	42.86
	1918	31,403	293,648	48,515	154.49
No 2— Western	1914	40,000	118,370	11,273	28.18
	1918	40,000	124,391	25,320	63.60
No. 3— Northern	1914	7,427	30,904	952	12.82
	1918	5,491	23,735	3,404	61.99

I emphasize that this was an independent Commission. The particulars set out in the table furnish eloquent reasons why the workers of Australia are anxious to secure redress of their grievances.

In connexion with the Basic Wage Commission's findings, the Government deliberately stated that as soon as possible they would give effect to the report of that Commission; they said that at the earliest possible date they would create effective machinery to that end. In view of that promise, and in order to bring matters to a head, I move—

That the following words be added to the motion:—

"and, in accordance with the definite pledge given by the Prime Minister in his  
Mr. Tudor.

policy speech at Bendigo on 30th October, 1919, the Government should give effect immediately to the finding of the Commission."

Mr. POYNTON.—What are the findings of the Commission?

Mr. TUDOR.—They are to be found on page 58 of the report of the Commission, and are as follows:—

In answer to clause 1 of the Letters Patent—

1. The actual cost of living at the present time, according to reasonable standards of comfort, including all matters comprised in the ordinary expenditure of a household, for a man with a wife and three children under fourteen years of age, is in—

	£ s. d.
Melbourne	5 16 6
Sydney	5 17 0
Brisbane	5 6 2
Newcastle	5 15 6
Adelaide	5 16 1
Perth	5 13 11
Hobart	5 16 11

In answer to clause 2 of the Letters Patent—

1. The actual corresponding cost of living in 1914 was—

	£ s. d.
Melbourne	3 7 9
Sydney	3 12 6
Brisbane	3 4 11
Adelaide	3 11 4
Perth	3 13 11
Hobart	3 6 1

2. Findings as to the last four years 1915-1919 are deferred pending Your Excellency's further directions.

In answer to clause 3 of the Letters Patent, the basic wage may be automatically adjusted to the rise and fall from time to time of the purchasing power of the sovereign, as follows:—

1. It should be the duty of a Bureau of Labour Statistics, staffed from existing members of the Commonwealth Public Service, to estimate, &c., from quarter to quarter, the actual cost of the several services and items set forth in the report as to rent, food, clothing, and miscellaneous.

2. This Bureau should declare that actual cost upon an average of prices of the preceding four quarters of the year.

3. This declaration should be reported to the Commonwealth Arbitration Court, with a view to its being made the basic wage by the Court in such manner as Parliament may prescribe.

These are the findings of the Commission. One of the most striking features of this report is that, notwithstanding the statements made from time to time by honorable members opposite as to the enormous increase in the cost of living in the State of Queensland, of which the honorable member for West Sydney (Mr. Ryan) was Premier for several years, we have the finding of this independent Commission, signed by every member of it, that the cost of living in Brisbane is

10s. 10d. per household per week less than it is in Sydney.

Mr. SPEAKER (Hon. Sir Elliot Johnson).—The honorable member's time has expired.

Mr. TUDOR.—Then I can only express the hope that those who desire to do justice to the workers of Australia will support the amendment which I have moved.

Mr. McWILLIAMS (Franklin) [10.34].—In view of the many serious aspects of this question, and having regard to the fact that honorable members generally desire to give it fair and open-minded consideration, I hope that the adjournment of the debate will be agreed to. I move—

That the debate be now adjourned.

Question put. The House divided.

Ayes	..	..	35
Noes	..	..	18

Majority	..	..	17
----------	----	----	----

AYES.

Atkinson, L.	Jackson, D. S.
Bayley, J. G.	Lamond, Hector
Bell, G. J.	Lister, J. H.
Blundell, R. P.	Livingston, J.
Bowden, E. K.	Mackay, G. H.
Bruce, S. M.	Marks, W. M.
Cameron, D. C.	Maxwell, G. A.
Chapman, Austin	McWilliams, W. J.
Cook, Sir Joseph	Poynton, A.
Corser, E. B. C.	Prowse, J. H.
Foster, Richard	Rodgers, A. S.
Fowler, J. M.	Ryrie, Sir Granville
Gibson, W. G.	Smith, Laird
Greene, W. M.	Stewart, P. G.
Gregory, H.	Wise, G. H.
Groom, L. E.	Tellers:
Higgs, W. G.	Burchell, R. J.
Hill, W. C.	Story, W. H.

NOES.

Brennan, F.	Moloney, Parker
Catts, J. H.	Riley, E.
Charlton, M.	Ryan, T. J.
Considine, M. P.	Tudor, F. G.
Cunningham, L. L.	Watkins, D.
Fenton, J. E.	West, J. E.
Gabb, J. M.	Tellers:
Lavelle, T. J.	Mahony, W. G.
Makin, N. J. O.	Mathews, J.
McGrath, D. C.	

PAIRS.

Best, Sir Robert	Maloney, Dr.
Hughes, W. M.	Lazzarini, H. P.
Marr, C. W. C.	Nicholls, S. R.
Jowett, E.	McDonald, C.
Hay, A.	Blakeley, A.
Watt, W. A.	Anstey, F.

Question resolved in the affirmative.  
Debate adjourned.

INDUSTRIAL PEACE BILL.

Mr. GROOM (Darling Downs—Minister for Works and Railways) [10.40].—I move—

That this Bill be now read a second time. In section 14 of the principal Act there is no express provision in regard to the decision of the majority of a Special Tribunal being the decision of the Tribunal, nor is there any express provision that, where the members of a Special Tribunal are equally divided, the opinion of the chairman shall prevail. It is quite possible that the section would be interpreted by a Court in accordance with the terms of the amendment which we now propose to make; but, in order to prevent any possible controversy on the point, the Government have introduced this Bill, in which it is provided that—

Section 14 of the Industrial Peace Act 1920 is amended by adding at the end thereof the following sub-section:

“(3) At meetings of a Special Tribunal the opinion of the majority shall prevail; and where the members of the Tribunal present are equally divided in opinion, the opinion of the chairman shall prevail.

“(4) Two-thirds of the members of a Special Tribunal shall form a quorum.”

I ask the House to deal with the Bill at once.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill read a second time, and passed through all stages without amendment.

ADJOURNMENT.

BASIC WAGE COMMISSION'S REPORT—  
LETTER CARRIERS, SYDNEY POST OFFICE.

Motion (by Sir JOSEPH COOK) proposed—

That the House do now adjourn.

Mr. RYAN (West Sydney) [10.44].—I rise to ask the Acting Leader of the House (Sir Joseph Cook) whether, before the House rises for the Christmas vacation, an opportunity will be given honorable members to proceed to a division on the amendment which has been moved this evening by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Tudor) on the motion by the Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes) for the printing of the report of the Basic Wage Commission.

**Mr. J. H. CATTS** (Cook) [10.45].—I wish to direct the attention of the Postmaster-General (Mr. Wise) to the conditions under which the letter-carriers work in the Sydney Post Office. I was in the office the other day when 200 letter-carriers were working shoulder to shoulder in a room which has neither ventilation nor natural light. On the same floor there is a large room called the old despatch room, 110 feet by 40 feet, with a second floor, the third of that size, which has been standing idle for the past five years. Surely there must be some gross mismanagement when men are herded together under such unhealthy conditions while there is so much space available. If those rooms were let they would, in such a situation as Martin-place, command a rental of at least £100 a week, and yet they are permitted to remain unused for years.

**Mr. WISE**.—I shall make inquiries into the matter.

**Sir JOSEPH COOK** (Parramatta—Treasurer) [10.48].—The honorable member for West Sydney (Mr. Ryan) asks whether, before the House rises for the recess, a decision will be come to on the amendment which has just been moved by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Tudor) in reference to the basic wage. I can only say that I hope a decision may be reached, and that to-morrow.

**Mr. RYAN**.—But if not reached to-morrow we may sit on. We are all anxious to come to a decision.

**Sir JOSEPH COOK**.—Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

House adjourned at 10.50 p.m.

## Senate.

*Friday, 26 November, 1920.*

The **PRESIDENT** (Senator the Hon. T. Givens) took the chair at 12 noon, and read prayers.

## WAR GRATUITY.

### CASE OF CAPTAIN STRASBURG.

**Senator GARDINER**.—I ask the Minister for Defence whether it is a fact that Captain Strasburg, who piloted the *Berrima*, and did useful work, which was

highly commended by all the superior officers who came in contact with him in the capture of many German boats in connexion with the Expedition to Rabaul, has been refused war gratuity, the reason given being that he was not a member of the Australian Forces?

**Senator PEARCE**.—I regret that I am not in a position to answer the honorable senator's question off-hand. I am aware that there has been some correspondence in regard to this case. If the honorable senator will put a question on the subject on the paper, I will undertake to have the matter followed up, and a reply forwarded to him later.

**Senator GARDINER**.—The honorable senator undertook to do that once before when I placed the facts before him, but I received no reply.

## PAPERS.

The following papers were presented:—

Defence Act and Naval Defence Act—Regulations Amended—Statutory Rules 1920, Nos. 222-223.

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE.

### REPORT ON PURCHASE OF SAWMILLS AND TIMBER AREAS.

**Senator J. D. MILLEN**, on behalf of the Public Accounts Committee, presented an interim report on the purchase of sawmills and timber areas in Queensland.

## BASIC WAGE.

**Senator GARDINER**.—Is it the intention of the Minister for Defence to give the Senate an opportunity of discussing the report of the Basic Wage Commission before we adjourn for the recess? Is it the intention of the Government to concede to the Public Service, at any rate, the basic wage recommended by the Royal Commission which they appointed?

**Senator PEARCE**.—There is a motion on the business-paper for the printing of the Estimates and Budget papers, and in view of the fact that the other House has not yet completed its labours, I propose to give honorable senators who may wish to discuss any particular matter which they regard as of importance, an opportunity, on the motion to which I have referred, to do so whilst we are waiting on another place. In regard to

the application of the basic wage recommended by the Royal Commission, the Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes) made a statement on the subject in another place, which I repeat here. The Government have not had an opportunity to fully consider the report of the Basic Wage Commission, and the memorandum presented by Mr. Piddington. They propose to consider, not only the general application of the basic wage recommended, but also its bearing on the basic wage now paid to the Public Service of the Commonwealth.

Senator BAKHAP.—Will copies of the report of the Commission be available to honorable senators during the recess?

Senator PEARCE.—There is a sufficient number of copies of the report now printed for circulation amongst members of this Parliament, and they will be at once circulated.

## NEED FOR INCREASED PRODUCTION.

### COMMISSION OF INQUIRY.

Senator LYNCH.—I ask the Minister for Defence whether, in view of the promise he made to the Senate that an inquiry will be held into the conditions of rural industries, particularly gold-mining and wheat-growing, that promise will be given effect to during the coming recess.

Senator PEARCE.—I informed Senator Lynch that the Government were not opposed to an inquiry into these matters, but would not bind themselves to the form of inquiry. On the day following the discussion of the honorable senator's motion, I obtained a copy of his remarks and the promise I made by way of interjection, and forwarded them to the Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes), directing his attention to the promise I had made, and asking him, as head of the Government, to give early consideration to that promise.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—Arising out of the answer to Senator Lynch's question, I should like to know whether it is intended that the inquiry shall be confined to wheat-growing and gold mining? Why should it not be extended to mining for other minerals? I believe that in the State of Tasmania there are millions of tons of barytes.

Senator BAKHAP.—Yes, and of tin, copper, and almost every other mineral.

Senator PEARCE.—If the honorable senator will look at my statement, he will see that I said that the Government would not be bound by the terms of Senator Lynch's motion as to the form of the inquiry that would be made. There is no reason why the matters to which Senator Guthrie has referred should not be considered.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—Several representations have been made to me concerning minerals in the Macdonnell Ranges, and if we are to have an inquiry into industries, we should consider, not merely the growing of wheat and mining for gold, but the growing of barley and other products, and mining for other minerals.

Senator BAKHAP.—May I ask the Minister for Defence, in connexion with his reply to Senator Lynch, whether he will recommend to the Prime Minister that any individual, or the members of any Commission appointed to make the promised inquiry, shall be selected from Parliamentarians, so that members of this Parliament may later, on the presentation of the report of the proposed Commission, be in a better position to perform their own work as the result of a verdict arrived at by persons with experience equal to their own?

Senator PEARCE.—I have not committed myself or the Government to the appointment of any particular form of Commission. I can promise Senator Bakhap that, in connexion with the constitution of the body appointed to make the promised inquiry, his suggestion will be brought under the notice of the head of the Government.

### LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

Motion (by Senator PEARCE) agreed to—

That leave of absence be granted to every member of the Senate from the determination of the Senate's last sitting in the year 1920 to the date of its first sitting in the year 1921.

### JERGER CASE.

#### DECISION OF MR. JUSTICE STARKE.

On notice of motion, private members' business, in the name of Senator Gardiner, being called for postponement or re-arrangement,

Senator GARDINER.—Should I be in order in moving the suspension of the Standing Orders to enable me to move my motion now?

The PRESIDENT (Senator the Hon. T. Givens).—The honorable senator may do so.

Motion (by Senator GARDINER) proposed—

That so much of the Standing and Sessional Orders be suspended as would prevent me from moving my motion.

The PRESIDENT.—There being no seconder for it, the motion lapses.

#### BUDGET (1920-21).

Debate resumed from 17th September (vide page 4722), on motion by Senator E. D. MILLEN—

That the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year ending 30th June, 1921, and the Budget-papers, 1920-21, laid on the table of the Senate on the 16th September, 1920, be printed.

Senator DE LARGIE (Western Australia) [12.10].—I have not very much to say on this motion, although it is one upon which there is ample room for discussion of any matter of importance.

The PRESIDENT (Senator the Hon. T. Givens).—That is not so, since the Estimates and Budget-papers have been dealt with. If the honorable senator will permit me, I shall explain the position. This motion has always been submitted in the Senate to give honorable senators an opportunity to initiate a general debate similar to that which takes place in another place on the Budget. The purpose has been to enable honorable senators to discuss all the items contained in the Budget, as is done in another place in the discussion of the Financial Statement. But I point out that the Budget has now been fully dealt with in the Senate, and it is not competent to have a second discussion on the same subject during the same session. There is no rule better known than that. Honorable senators will see that, in speaking to this motion now, the only question that can be discussed is whether the Estimates and Budget-papers should, or should not, be printed.

Senator DE LARGIE.—The ruling just given blocks me from bringing up a matter of the greatest importance to the Senate, and, therefore, I refuse to say more at this stage. But on the motion

for the adjournment of the Senate I shall speak, sir, to a matter between yourself and me and a third party. I shall get it out.

Senator GARDINER (New South Wales) [12.12].—I wish to offer as a good reason why the Budget-papers should not be printed the fact that they do not contain an account of the unfair treatment meted out to Captain Strasburg by the present Government. I believe that the Minister for Defence will agree with me—

The PRESIDENT (Senator the Hon. T. Givens).—Order! The honorable senator is not in order. The matter to which he is referring might have been gone into fully on the other occasions upon which the Estimates and Budget-papers were considered by the Senate. The honorable senator cannot raise a discussion on a matter of that kind on the motion now before the Senate without contravening my ruling; but, as Senator de Largie has just indicated, he can say what he desires on the motion for the adjournment of the Senate.

Senator PEARCE (Western Australia—Minister for Defence) [12.13].—I do not wish Senator Gardiner, or any other honorable senator, to be under the impression that in making the statement I made just now I was aware that the President would rule as he has done. I was absolutely unaware that he would do so. In order to honour the promise I gave to honorable senators, that they should have an opportunity of discussing the report of the Basic Wage Commission, I propose to move the discharge of this Order of the Day from the paper, and to follow that up by submitting a motion for the printing of the report of the Basic Wage Commission and the memorandum of Mr. Piddington. I move—

That the Order of the Day be discharged.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

#### BASIC WAGE.

Senator PEARCE (Western Australia—Minister for Defence) [12.14].—I move—

That the report of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into a basic wage, and the memorandum of Mr. Piddington accompanying the report, be printed.

I submit this motion in order to give honorable senators an opportunity to express their views on this subject if they desire to do so. I can only repeat what I have

already announced in this Chamber. The Government do not feel disposed, before fully studying the report and its accompanying memorandum, to say what attitude they intend to adopt on the report as a whole.

Senator CRAWFORD.—Honorable senators have not yet seen the report.

Senator PEARCE.—No. I have seen a copy, but I have not had time to read it.

Senator BAKHAP.—Has not Professor Osborne issued a report of his own?

Senator PEARCE.—I did not know anything about that. The report was placed in the hands of the Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes) on Sunday last, when only one copy was available. Other Ministers were not supplied with copies until the following Wednesday, when they were distributed at a Cabinet meeting at noon. Honorable senators are aware that Ministers' time has been very fully occupied since then, and, consequently, it would be foolish if the Government professed to be in a position to come to any decision, because the document is one that needs very careful consideration. The Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes) has already made it quite clear that the claims of public servants will receive immediate attention. But that, too, is a matter that must be considered from every point of view, because the decision given in regard to the basic wage and whether a married allowance should be granted must affect the whole community.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—Is there any truth in the *Argus* report that the Prime Minister made a certain statement in Sydney?

Senator PEARCE.—I have no knowledge of the matter, and I do not know if such a promise was made. That is all I feel I can say at this juncture, but, as other honorable senators may wish to express their opinions, I have given them this opportunity.

Senator GARDINER (New South Wales) [12.17].—So as not to transgress any of our Standing Orders, I would like to know, sir, whether, on a broad motion of this character, I will be in order in discussing matters not contained in the report.

The PRESIDENT (Senator the Hon. T. Givens).—It is impossible for me to determine at this juncture whether the honorable senator will be in order or not.

Senator GARDINER.—I think I should have an opportunity of dealing with matters that are not in any way connected with the Public Service on the motion that the report and the memorandum accompanying it be printed. If the Standing Orders do not permit me to do so, I shall have to avail myself of the opportunity on the motion for the adjournment.

A basic wage for the different States has been arrived at by men well qualified to make a thorough investigation, and who took ample time to make the inquiry as complete as possible. As to what is really a living wage in Australia for a man, his wife, and three children, there is room for considerable difference of opinion and lengthy discussion. In the case of New South Wales, the State which I represent, Mr. Piddington and his colleagues have fixed a rate which, under all the circumstances, I do not think can be considered excessive. Anyone who knows Mr. Piddington, and has had an opportunity of judging his great ability and the industry he brings to bear upon any work he undertakes, must admit that the decisions have not been reached without mature consideration.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—And the honorable senator refused to put him on the High Court Bench.

Senator GARDINER.—I do not know why I should be interrupted by stupid interjections of that character. Mr. Piddington was appointed to the High Court Bench, but resigned.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—Why?

Senator GARDINER.—I do not know why I should be asked to go into that question, but the mere fact that the Government considered him a man possessing sufficient ability to occupy a high judicial position should be sufficient to prove that his qualifications cannot be questioned. He resigned of his own volition because of certain criticisms, and being a somewhat sensitive and highly strung man, he did not feel disposed to take the position when his appointment did not have the support of those associated with him. After mature consideration and close investigation, Mr. Piddington and those associated with him have decided that £5 17s. is necessary to support a man, his wife and three children in the city of Sydney. In the State of Queensland, where there is a Labour Government, and where, in consequence,

the cost of living is cheaper, a somewhat lower rate has been fixed. The Parliament and Government of this country have to face the fact that the workers in Australia, whether in the Public Service or not, have, for a considerable time owing to the increased and ever increasing cost of living been faced with great hardship, and have been living or existing I know not how. I feel sure that honorable senators wonder how, under the grave conditions which prevail, a working man with a family of more than three children can possibly exist. The experts appointed by the Government to inquire into this matter have recommended what they consider a basic wage for the maintenance of a family of three. I realize that at the first glance the amount seems large compared with the wages of a few years ago; but, in comparison with the cost of living before the war, the amount is exceedingly small. My advice to the Government—which I hope they will accept, as they will not have the opportunity of taking advantage of it for some months—is that if they have the power to enforce a basic wage, they should give effect to it at once. They have authority to apply it to the Public Service, but I advise them to face the situation boldly, and tell the workers of the Commonwealth that they do not expect them to live on a wage less than that recommended by the Commission.

Senator ROWELL.—Would it not mean that they would be actually worse off than at present?

Senator GARDINER.—I know there are great dangers of ills that might accrue from what I take would be the logical consequence of what the Government should do. If the Government desired to ascertain a basic wage by appointing a Royal Commission, and have practically pledged themselves to give effect to the Commission's recommendations, it is time for them to act. What is the use of calling expert evidence if it is to be entirely disregarded? This is by no means a party matter, but one of grave importance to the Commonwealth of Australia. We have been told that it will spell ruin and disaster to the industries in Australia. That may, or may not, be so. But, from opinions one may form from a casual perusal of figures or from close reading of *Knibbs*, the wealth of Australia is so divided that 85 per cent.

of the wealth is in the hands of 15 per cent. of the people.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—That is not so.

Senator GARDINER.—Then *Knibbs* must be wrong. I do not make statements in this Chamber without fortifying myself by obtaining accurate information. I do not suggest that the wealth should be taken from those who possess it, but that the earnings of workers should be more equitably distributed, so that many who are now merely existing should have an opportunity of living in reasonable comfort.

In answer to a question, the Minister for Defence (Senator Pearce) admitted that the employees in the Public Service, including married men, were receiving £3 12s. per week. If that is the rate in a city such as Sydney, where the bare cost of living, according to the report of the Commission, is £5 17s. per week, these patriotic public servants for years past have either been living on their capital or getting into debt in order to give their services to this rich Commonwealth. Facts like these have to be faced, and it is no use endeavouring to allow this discussion to drift in such a manner that no good can be accomplished. If married men in the Public Service are receiving £3 12s. or £3 13s. a week, it is time drastic action was taken. There is not an honorable senator, I am sure, who would wish a public servant to be employed at a wage or salary that was insufficient to maintain him and his family in reasonable comfort. If such is the case, it is imperative that the Government, which is controlling the living conditions and destinies of such a large number of men, women, and children, should immediately remove the real grievances which exist. For some time past I have watched the growing agitation in the Service, and I believe that our Commonwealth employees are quite justified in bringing their case before the people in an effective manner. It has been said that the position of public servants is to be brought before the public by displaying facts and figures on picture screens; but I do not believe in that. Are the Government aware of the fact that married men have been compelled to maintain their families on their capital or run into debt, because they are not receiving sufficient from their

employers to enable them to exist? I agree with the Minister that the Government should have time to fully consider a report of such an important character.

Senator J. D. MILLEN.—And find the money.

Senator GARDINER.—Yes, and find the money. But, while that is being done, the Government must be held responsible for the conditions which prevail. Let me show the difference there is between the public servants, or the employees of the Commonwealth, as I prefer to call them, and outside employees.

Senator PEARCE.—The honorable senator's allegations have no foundation, because yesterday I laid on the table of the Senate the reports of twenty cases heard in the Arbitration Court in which claims were made.

Senator GARDINER.—The position of persons engaged in the Public Service is entirely different from that of those in private employ, different from, say, that of a clerk in a warehouse, because if the latter's earnings are insufficient for his needs, he may employ his leisure hours by making up income tax returns or doing other work, and thus add to his income.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—But I thought you were an eight-hours man.

Senator GARDINER.—The honorable senator may think what he likes. Usually he thinks in such a confused and stupid manner that it does not matter much what he thinks. He would be well advised to remain silent when another honorable senator is endeavouring to address himself to a serious subject. I have to admit that frequently I lose my temper in this Senate because of stupid interjections, and I think that when we are dealing with a matter of such a serious nature as this, flippant and uncalled-for remarks are altogether out of place.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—Absolutely.

Senator GARDINER.—I know the honorable senator is thinking that my temper will take me off a subject which I am endeavouring to deal with in my own way, and which he has not the courage himself to face. When I point out that employees of private firms may, in their leisure hours, by other employment, add to their income, I am met with the interjection from Senator Guthrie that he thought I was an eight-hours

man. I prefer the hours which the Senate works, for I find that, during the whole of this session, the average is a little less than three hours for each sitting.

Senator J. F. GUTHRIE.—And some honorable senators are not here very often either.

Senator GARDINER.—Quite so. I notice that the honorable senator is one of the very few who live in Melbourne, and attend fairly regularly.

Senator J. F. GUTHRIE.—I do not live in Melbourne.

Senator GARDINER.—No; but the honorable senator is within easy distance of the city.

But let me return to my subject. In ordinary times, I would not approve of public servants accepting outside employment in their leisure hours; but if, by means of regulations, or the conditions of employment, our public servants are not properly treated, we are, I think, bound to give them that opportunity. We are bound to see that they are not sweated. Now this Commission, after a searching inquiry into the cost of living, has come to certain conclusions as to the basic wage of the Commonwealth. Surely honorable senators realize what a great amount of mental unrest there is among those in the community who are not getting sufficient to maintain their families in comfort. I hold that the payment of the basic wage will not have the serious effect that some people imagine it will have, because the increased purchasing power given to the whole community will add to business in every direction.

Senator FAIRBAIRN.—It will increase the prices of commodities. That is the trouble.

Senator GARDINER.—It will increase the purchasing power of the people, and therefore it will increase the returns of people engaged in business.

Senator J. F. GUTHRIE.—It will nearly double the cost of production.

Senator GARDINER.—If I were given unlimited power for one day, I would decrease the cost of production by 25 per cent. Would the honorable senator follow me?

Senator J. F. GUTHRIE.—If you could do that, I would.

Senator GARDINER.—I would decrease the cost of production simply by

abolishing the Tariff, and making it possible to obtain the necessary machinery for production at lower cost. This would bring down the cost of production.

Senator CRAWFORD.—But agricultural machinery is dearer in Free Trade countries than in Australia.

Senator GARDINER.—I would like to know where these Free Trade countries are?

Senator EARLE.—New Zealand, for one.

Senator GARDINER.—Does the honorable senator say that New Zealand is a Free Trade country? I lived there some years ago, and I know what high Protective duties are imposed.

Senator EARLE.—Not on agricultural machinery.

Senator GARDINER.—I merely referred incidentally to the enormous burden placed upon production by the imposition of Customs duties. Only a month or two ago there was a statement in the press that the Customs charges on a shipment of hats from Italy were so high, based upon the present rate of exchange, that the importing firm would have been landed in a heavy loss if they had passed entries for the goods.

Senator LYNCH.—Does the honorable senator seriously contend that the abolition of the Tariff would make it possible to pay the basic wage?

Senator GARDINER.—I contend that it would enable the people to get cheaper commodities and so reduce the cost of living.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—What would your leader in the other place (Mr. Tudor) say if we abolished the duties on hats?

Senator GARDINER.—That does not count. We want to face the facts. I say that the Government have added enormously to the cost of living by high Customs duties in a new Tariff, which, so far, Parliament has not had an opportunity of discussing. I realize that, when we start a discussion on a question like this, some honorable senator is bound to say that increased wages must, of course, mean an increased price for commodities, and that there is no end to, and no way out of, a very serious position. I believe there is a way out. I believe that if the great masses of the people are expected to do the impossible, and maintain their families on insufficient wages, then the end to that form of government which

allows this state of affairs to continue will come; because, as all honorable senators know, Governments exist only with the consent of the governed. As other honorable senators desire to speak on this subject, I have no desire to prolong my remarks. I urge the Government to face the situation in a manly way, to tell the people in Australia that the Commissioners, about whose ability and integrity there can be no doubt, have made a certain recommendation, and that they intend to adopt it by paying the Public Service, without any further delay, the full amount set out in the report.

Senator PEARCE.—Do you mean the adoption of the report with the family allowances?

Senator GARDINER.—I mean the basic wage as generally understood. I have not had time to give consideration to the complicated method suggested by the Commissioners, and to which the Minister has drawn my attention. The drastic results anticipated in some quarters will, I think, be more imaginary than real. This has been our experience throughout the Commonwealth in regard to all other matters. The Government should pay the full basic wage, then take their own time to work out the problem, and, if necessary, keep Parliament sitting until the matter has been dealt with to the satisfaction of the Public Service and the rest of Australia.

Senator FAIRBAIRN (Victoria) [12.43].—I am encouraged to say a word or two on this important subject by Senator Gardiner's remark that other honorable senators are just as anxious as he is to see that every person in the Commonwealth receives a sufficient wage to enable him to live in decent comfort. This question wants consideration, not only by the Government, because they have power to deal only with the Public Service, but by all sections of the community. The Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes) should summon the round-table conference of employers and employees to which he referred some time ago. The ramifications of this problem are many. Senator Gardiner has just told us that 15 per cent. of the people of Australia own 85 per cent. of the wealth. I wonder if he gave consideration to the fact that the 15 per cent. includes all the companies, because, for statistical purposes, a company is regarded as a person.

Senator PEARCE.—The Australian Mutual Provident Society, for instance?

Senator FAIRBAIRN.—Yes. The Australian Mutual Provident Society, I think, includes about 40,000 individuals; so is it likely that the figures as to the percentage of wealth owned by 15 per cent. of the people of the Commonwealth are rather inflated? The whole trouble wants sifting to the bottom, and this can only be done, in my judgment, by a conference as suggested by the Prime Minister. There are tremendous difficulties to be overcome. Take the man who grows crossbred wool. At present, he cannot sell it, so how could he expect to pay any wage at all, let alone the basic wage? His neighbour, who might be growing merino wool, can get enormous prices for the product, and pay almost any wage without any disturbance to his industry. All these things must be gone into very carefully. We cannot expect to do it in a day or a month.

Senator J. D. MILLEN.—And a very big sum is involved.

Senator FAIRBAIRN.—An enormous sum of money is involved, and so action cannot be taken hurriedly. If this basic wage is paid, the cost to Australia, according to Mr. Piddington, will be an additional £93,000,000, and, according to Mr. Knibbs, £101,000,000. The total wealth produced in Australia last year was only £298,000,000. Assuming that labour gets one-half of that, there will be left £149,000,000, so that all that would remain, according to Mr. Piddington, would be about £50,000,000 with which to pay everything outside of the bare cost of labour. My own opinion is that the only way in which we can get along smoothly is by an agreement between employers and employees. But there are some wild men who have attained to positions of leadership in the industrial unions, and who do not desire industrial peace. Senator Gardiner knows that what I say is true, and frequently has to combat this extreme element. These extremists desire a new state of society. But our present state of society is the result of thousands of years of careful building up. We see what has been the result of extreme measures in the dreadful example which Russia presents to the world at the present time. We cannot bring about reforms by revolution—I am sorry to hear

Senator Gardiner refer to revolution sometimes—we can secure them only by peaceful evolution. In Australia the process of evolution has been very rapid. We are doing away with classes, notwithstanding the fact that many of these agitators are constantly endeavouring to stir up class feeling as much as possible. I hope that in the near future we shall have only two classes in Australia—the workers and the loafers. We wish to insure that every man shall do his fair share of work.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—But big fortunes are made by men who do not work.

Senator FAIRBAIRN.—I am not suggesting that work is done entirely by hand. There are many men who work extremely hard with their brains. When we attain to the ideal state of Socialism my honorable friends of the Labour party can keep a job for me in which I shall have to work only eight hours per day. I shall then be able to enjoy a glass of beer, which, at present, I can not touch. At this late stage of the session it is idle for me to attempt to discuss this matter in all its bearings, but I hope that the Leader of the Senate will direct the attention of the Prime Minister to the promise which he made some time ago in regard to the holding of a round-table conference between representatives of employers and of employees. I trust that the unions will send to that conference only reasonable men—not men who wish to destroy society by means of revolution. Such individuals injure the condition of the worker more than does anybody else. A revolution in a country like Australia, where practically every person has a good sum of money in the Savings Bank, is almost impossible. But if representatives of the employers and of the employees could meet at a round-table conference some good might result from their deliberations.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—Whom would the honorable senator send as the representative of the employers of Victoria?

Senator FAIRBAIRN.—It would be very difficult to get anybody to undertake that duty. I experienced the utmost trouble in inducing Mr. E. Keppel to accept a position upon the Basic Wage Commission. Finally, he accepted it upon the

distinct assurance that its investigations would last only six weeks. They have lasted twelve months, and have cost the Commonwealth £40,000. The result of their labours is very disappointing.

Senator DE LARGIE.—I have heard the honorable senator make the same statement in regard to Mr. Keep upon several occasions.

Senator FAIRBAIRN.—Yes. That gentleman blackguards me for the action which I took upon every occasion that he meets me. The only way in which we can secure industrial peace, I repeat, is by a conference between representatives of the employers and of the employees, and in the absence of industrial peace the outlook is pretty well hopeless.

Senator DE LARGIE (Western Australia) [12.51].—The honorable senator who has just resumed his seat has suggested the advisableness of a conference being held between representatives of the employers and of the employees to decide this very intricate question. At the present time a proposal is being made to summon a Convention for the purpose of solving a very much more insignificant question, namely, the revision of our Constitution. When we attempt to settle the problem of a basic wage by means of a round-table conference between representatives of the employers and of the employees, we are attempting an impossible task, for the simple reason that it is the most gigantic question which any body of men—no matter how eminent they may be—can possibly take in hand. It involves the study of one of the greatest questions in the world—that of economics. To suggest that the representatives of two sets of people can satisfactorily decide this world-wide problem is utterly ridiculous. Will anybody who knows anything about production and political economy affirm that we could have expected this Commission to arrive at a satisfactory solution of the problem with which it was confronted? Its members were given a task which it was quite impossible for any five men to solve. It is no surprise to me that they have failed. In order to get to the root of the trouble we should need to enter into the whole of the ramifications of wealth production. When Senator Lynch gave notice of his very lengthy motion in regard to rural

industries, some of us were inclined to think that it outlined an altogether too comprehensive scheme. But nothing short of some such scheme can possibly solve the question which we are now discussing. One has only to look at the terms of that motion to obtain an idea of the enormous issues which are involved. I do not claim to have a closer acquaintance with the report of the Commission than may be gained by a perusal of the press reports of its proceedings. But when evidence was being tendered to it, I could not fail to notice that the only persons who were examined were those who represented the trade unions of Australia. It was only proper that they should be represented, and that they should give evidence before this tribunal. But when the producers' side is confined to that one section of the community, we naturally get only a very small view of the question of production. Most of the witnesses who appeared before the Commission were men who were engaged in the production of commodities for the Australian market—commodities the price of which could be fixed in Australia without any regard to the wages being paid in similar industries outside the Commonwealth. But when we come to the question of production and export, can we treat it in the same high-handed manner? No. We then have to consider what the world's market would return one for his labour. A man may make an engine, or a suit of clothes, or any other article which is to be consumed in Australia, and the price of that article may be fixed here; but if an attempt be made to fix its export price, one will immediately be faced with an entirely different proposition. That being so, need anybody be surprised at the failure of the Basic Wage Commission, seeing that the man who carts bread around the city is demanding £7 a week in wages, whilst the man who is driving a team of horses upon a wheat farm considers himself very lucky if he can secure only half of that amount?

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—What about the man who has to take that corn round the Horn?

Senator DE LARGIE.—We hear a horn very often! If we look at the production from that greatly enlarged point

of view, we shall recognise that the Commission was set an utterly impossible task. Consequently I am not surprised that the figures quoted by the Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes), when dealing with this question in another place, showed conclusively that if the recommendations of the Commission were adopted we should be attempting to take out of the wages fund more than is actually going into it. If we endeavour to do that, how long will the position in Australia be satisfactory? The Prime Minister showed that if we raised the basic wage to £5 16s. per week, within a very few months—by reason of the increased prices of commodities—a further increase in that wage would be necessary. After that second rise had been satisfied, another increase would be inevitable, and this process would be repeated *ad infinitum*. Therefore, I say that the Commission was set a task which it was impossible for it to perform.

**Senator J. F. GUTHRIE** (Victoria) [12.59].—I desire to address myself very briefly to this important question at the present juncture, because, like other honorable senators, I recognise that we have not had a fair opportunity of studying the report of the Basic Wage Commission. That report demands very careful consideration at our hands. It cannot be scrapped, and the opinion of any one man upon it will not exercise very much influence with me. I agree with many of the remarks which have been made by Senator Gardiner; but when he affirmed that the cost of living in Queensland was cheaper than it is in the other States, he omitted to mention the reason for that. The fact is that in Queensland there is a large nomadic population, which lives in tents and inferior houses. In Brisbane, for example, rents are 5s. per week cheaper than they are in Sydney. Many people who reside in the centre and the western portion of Queensland live in houses which are built entirely of iron, whilst a great number reside in tents.

*Sitting suspended from 1 till 2.30 p.m.*

**Senator J. F. GUTHRIE**.—I had just begun, before the suspension of the sitting, to discuss the basic wage and to disprove some of the statements of Senator Gardiner, who had stressed the point

that, on account of a Labour Government being in power in Queensland, the cost of living was lower there than elsewhere. I find from Knibbs that, although the cost of living ought to be very much less in Queensland than in any other State, because very much lower rents are paid there owing to the inferiority of the houses, and the great number of people who live in tents, and despite the fact that the Queensland Government practically steal the beef from the producers at an absurdly low price, at which they do not sell what they produce themselves, yet the purchasing power of money has depreciated in Queensland since pre-war days in a greater ratio than in any other State. In 1914 what 21s. 1d. bought in Melbourne, it now takes 29s. 7d. to buy, and in Perth what 22s. 10d. then bought now costs 29s. 4d., but in Brisbane what 19s. 11d. bought in 1914 it now takes 28s. 10d. to buy. Therefore the depreciation in the purchasing power of the sovereign is greater in Queensland than in any other State. It must also be borne in mind that owing to the warmer climatic conditions, it is not necessary to spend so much money on clothing in Queensland as it is in the more southern States. The rise in wages is less in Queensland compared with 1914 than in any other State. In New South Wales the weekly rise in wages as compared with 1914 is 9s. 11d., in Tasmania it is 9s. 2d., whereas in Queensland it is only 7s. 6d.

Like all Nationalists, I believe in a basic wage, and have always maintained that either the cost of living had to come down or wages must go up. That is the object of the Nationalist Government. The great trouble is that if we put up wages indefinitely, without consideration of other factors, we simply go round in a vicious circle, which means higher wages and higher prices of commodities. As the Minister for Defence suggests, it is like a dog chasing his own tail. While some industries can bear perhaps greater increases in wages than have been paid in the past, many others cannot possibly do so. The production of raw commodities is an instance. If we award a very high basic wage to people who work on farms, how can we demand a cheap loaf? We cannot have it both ways.

**Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.**—Cannot 3s. 11½d. for a pound of wool pay a fairly good wage?

**Senator J. F. GUTHRIE.**—I can see at a glance that the honorable senator is an extremist. He picks out an extreme case, and not a fair average. If we pay extreme rates of wages to those who work on primary production, we cannot expect cheap bread, meat, or butter.

I agree with Senator Fairbairn that round-table conferences must do good, but the great trouble in Australia is that, whilst certain sections of the community are working, a very large proportion of the population are agitating, slowing down, striking, and thus not helping to increase that production which is essential to bring down the cost of living. I have spoken fully on previous occasions on the question of the cost of living and the paramount necessity for increased production. To increase production we must have more work, less slowing down, fewer strikes, and fewer agitators. As honorable senators wish to get away, and as Senator Gardiner, to whom I particularly wished to direct my remarks this afternoon, is not present, I shall conclude by expressing the hope that I shall have another opportunity of making a more carefully prepared speech on the basic wage question. I believe in the principle of a basic wage, and am convinced that it is essential that we should handle this question very thoroughly and carefully, as no doubt the National party intend to do. We must increase wages or decrease the cost of living if we wish to have in this country peace and industrial rest, and that comfort which we, as Christian men, desire all to have.

**Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE** (South Australia) [2.36].—The previous speaker pins his faith to round-table conferences as a means of settling industrial troubles. I suppose no man in Australia has attended more round-table conferences than I did, up to the time when the Federal Parliament in its wisdom passed the Conciliation and Arbitration Act. That took the place of the round-table conferences. I, as an executive officer of an industrial union, hailed the change with satisfaction, and I do not think any

one in Australia took a more active interest in the question of arbitration than I did. A good many years ago men now sitting on the Treasury bench stated that arbitration was only a matter of bridging over things, and that we must get down to the root of the question—that is, the land—if we wanted to put Australia on a solid footing. I submit that arbitration, at the very least, was a means of bridging over trouble. My experience previously was that we had negotiations and a new agreement every six months. We came up against this position: The shippers, Dalgety and Company amongst others, said, “The ship-owners are giving way too freely to the seamen, and are increasing their wages beyond rates which our shareholders and the shipping community can pay.”

**Senator J. F. GUTHRIE.**—Dalgety's never said that. They do not own a ship.

**Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.**—I remember one ship they had.

**Senator J. F. GUTHRIE.**—You sank it.

**Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.**—I did not. Dalgety's sold it at a big profit. The consensus of opinion was that the round-table conferences were unsatisfactory. The managers of the steam-ship companies were being attacked by their shareholders and by the shipping people for giving way too lightly to the seamen, while on the other hand the seamen's representatives were accused of giving way too lightly to the steam-ship owners. In, I think, 1910, the proposition was put up, “Why not let somebody else settle our differences?” In 1911, the business went into the Court, and Mr. Justice Higgins has been saddled ever since with the whole burden of increased freights and increased wages. I do not want to go back to the round-table method, and I do not think that honorable senators will attempt anything of the sort if they give the question proper consideration.

The whole point of this debate is the question of what it costs a man to live. Take the men on the Australian coasts, men who are doing bigger work in transporting our products from State to State and to foreign shores than any farmer in Australia is doing.

Senator WILSON.—They would not unload the sugar.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—That was not the seamen; it was my honorable friend's friends. Why should not men who carry the products of Australia round the world receive as much consideration as has been demanded from the benches on both sides of this Chamber for the man who reaps wheat or digs gold? Senator Crawford, for instance, has only two ideas in his head—one is bananas, and the other is sugar. Where does the wealth of Australia come from?

Senator J. F. GUTHRIE.—The land, every time.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—Then let us get back to Senator Pearce's teaching, and put on the single tax. Senator Pearce advocated that when he came to this Chamber.

Senator PEARCE.—I did not.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—Do honorable senators believe that Senator Pearce's policy in 1900 was wrong?

Senator J. F. GUTHRIE.—Give us your policy.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—My policy is to tax you big squatters who sell your wool at 3s. 11½d. per lb., and get 60 lbs. off a sheep.

Senator BAKHAP.—They might get 60 lbs. of mutton, but not of wool!

Senator CRAWFORD.—The single tax means taxing the people off the land.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—I remember that very long ago Senator Crawford was also a single taxer.

Senator CRAWFORD.—Never in my life. The honorable senator's memory is at fault.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—Senator Crawford followed Billy Lane—

Senator CRAWFORD.—Not to Paraguay.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—The honorable senator was not game, but he followed Lane in his single tax policy.

Senator CRAWFORD.—Never. Lane went a long way further than the single tax.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—I want to disabuse the minds of honorable senators of delusions about the round-table conference. Nothing can settle industrial disputes unless it has the force of law behind it. Agreements may be

broken at any time, and have been broken. It requires the power of the law to enforce them. The world is supremely interested to-day in what is being done by the League of Nations. Are we to have a round-table conference to maintain the peace of the world? It is clear that such a round-table conference can be of no use unless the agreements at which it arrives are policed by the League of Nations. I am prepared to favour round-table conferences for the settlement of industrial disputes if a means is discovered to police the agreements arrived at. If we had force behind the decisions of such round-table conferences, there would be very few merchants and manufacturers in Australia out of gaol in a very short time, because they are breaking agreements all the time.

Senator J. F. GUTHRIE.—Whom is the honorable senator hitting at? Who are his friends?

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—I have an illustration in support of my statement out of the honorable senator's own mouth. He has told us recently about some one who committed a fraud.

Senator J. F. GUTHRIE.—And who has since apologized to me.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—A round-table conference without force behind it is of as little use as the fifth wheel of a coach.

Senator J. D. MILLEN.—The fifth wheel of a motor car is the steering wheel.

Senator R. STORRIE GUTHRIE.—The fifth wheel of the Arbitration Courts has been the lawyer, and he has sucked everything out of arbitration that he could possibly get out of it.

Senator J. D. MILLEN (Tasmania) [2.48].—One of the most important questions which honorable senators and honorable members in another place have to address themselves to is that of the basic rate of wages. I realize, with Senator R. Storrie Guthrie, that there is difficulty connected with the round-table conference. I maintain that the only possible hope we have if we are to effectively deal with the question is in co-operation and profit-sharing. When Senator R. Storrie Guthrie referred to ships, he brought to my mind something which I read in a New York newspaper a short time ago. In the month of August of this year the *Crema*, an Italian ship, arrived in New York. She was one of a flotilla of five

vessels handed over by the Italian Government to a society somewhat similar to our Seamen's Society here, which had been formed into a co-operative union for the purpose of taking over these five vessels from the Italian Government and working them and keeping the profits made from their operations. They have made a good thing of it, and have put all profits, over and above their wages, into other ships. When a representative of one of the New York newspapers asked the chief officer of this society how they dealt with trouble amongst the seamen, his reply was, "We have none." When he was asked "Why?" he said, "For the simple reason that the seaman who does not do his work in a seaman-like manner is fired out of the union and black-listed, and that results in maintaining efficiency and economy, and producing profits."

Senator WILSON.—That is the remedy for half the trouble.

Senator J. D. MILLEN.—I got up just to say so. I go a step further. In Cleveland to-day they have started a bank known as the Bank of the Co-operative Locomotive Drivers Association, with a capital of \$1,000,000. The members of this association have said that they have had enough of handing over their money to other banks in order that it might be used to fight themselves. They are now putting their money into their own bank to finance their own affairs. Last month, in Chicago, the Garment Workers Association started mills of their own. They propose to have their own retail establishments for the sale of the material they manufacture in their own mills.

I do not propose to keep the Senate many minutes longer, but I should like to say a word or two about Leclaire, who started the scheme of profit-sharing in Paris. Leclaire was born in 1804, and was apprenticed at eighteen years of age to the business of a painter, which was one of the most difficult trades then carried on in Paris. In 1828 he was himself employing nine employees. It was not long before he found it difficult to retain his men. In 1830 he reduced the hours of labour of his men from eleven to ten per day. In 1838 he started a mutual provident society in order that permanent employees might be provided with a certain sum of money when they became sick. In 1841 he went to the members of the mutual provident society with a

proposal. He said, "I have thoroughly considered this matter, and I believe that you can save me a considerable amount of time on your work and can save a considerable amount in materials if you agree to do so." They said "No." In 1842 he called them together, threw 12,000 francs on the table, and handed each of them the equivalent of £11 in our money. They then realized that there was something in it, and from that moment the business started to go ahead. He withdrew from the business in 1869, leaving his capital in it at 5 per cent. It was continued on the lines he had laid down, the workers receiving 50 per cent. in profits, the mutual provident society 35 per cent., and the managers 15 per cent. The business was going on splendidly in 1912, when the workmen received 212,000 francs, to be divided amongst ninety-three of them.

Honorable senators can realize that that was a scheme in which the workman was not fighting against the employer, because he was his own employer. If you go to Ford's place in America to-day and ask a man there if he is working for Ford, the motor car manufacturer, he will tell you that he is not working for Ford, but working with him. There is a very material difference. In the United States to-day the great United Steel Trust is endeavouring to induce its employees to take up its stock and to accept representation on its Board. Those concerned with the railroads in that country are prepared to adopt the same course. The new Railway Bill there is going to mean an increase in cost amounting to \$3,600,000,000 per annum, and the only way in which the enterprise can be successfully carried on is for the employees to buy the stock, get representation on the Board, and look for their reward to a share in the profits.

Senator BAKHAP.—The keystone of an arch of that kind is always rare organizing ability.

Senator J. D. MILLEN.—The keystone of any industrial arch is always rare organizing ability. I maintain that the man who is controlling the traffic is capable of going on the board of directors and helping to control the destinies of the railroad. We should do all that is possible to encourage co-operation in industry. The world is going to learn that lesson. The basic rate may be fixed at any standard we please, but if it is

fixed too high, as Senator de Largie has pointed out, it will exhaust the wages fund. There is no possible hope of doing things like that. We must produce if we are to expect a return. It is of no use to say that we can carry on on credit. There are many examples to show us what carrying on on credit means. Just after the French War they said, "We will have credit, and that is good enough. There is no better security for credit than the land we stand on," and it took £100 of their money to buy a pair of boots. In 1873 the United States of America was flooded with bills to such an extent that the statement was made that it took a basketful of bills to bring home a purseful of meat. Bills were issued on the Continent of Europe to such an extent that they became of so little value as to give rise to our term, "It does not matter a continental." They were considered cheaper than wallpaper. The fact is that we must produce more if we are to increase the rate of wages. Employers to-day are generally becoming more and more influenced by the public sentiment in favour of giving to the worker a higher standard of living, and I maintain that it is only by a system of co-operation and profit-sharing that we can hope to find a solution of the difficulties with which this country is now faced.

**Senator LYNCH (Western Australia)** [2.58].—It cannot be expected that a matured judgment on this question can be arrived at in a hasty way. The report of the Basic Wage Commission has been in our possession for twenty-four hours, and during that time we have had an all-night sitting. Honorable senators, therefore, have not had time to digest its contents. However, broadly speaking, on this question of a basic wage it can be said, I believe, on behalf of every member of this Parliament, that the time has come in this country when the employees can no longer be regarded as chattel possessions of the employer. It is admitted, on the contrary, that he is an actual, and not merely a nominal, partner in the industry in which he is employed. The extent to which he should share the rewards of that industry is a fundamental problem for which, up to the present, no one has found a practicable solution.

**Senator J. D. MILLEN.**—What about the factory at Sunlight. Has not Lord

Leverhulme established a practicable scheme there?

**Senator LYNCH.**—I indorse all that Senator J. D. Millen has said about profit-sharing as a means of solving this hitherto insolvable problem. I have already in my own State of Western Australia seriously put forward a proposal for profit sharing. I urged that the Government might assist the movement by agreeing to remit taxation from enterprises carried on under the system of sharing profits with the employees. My proposal was regarded as Utopian, but I still stand to it. It was discussed for days in the Western State as a means by which some effort might be made to solve this knotty, ancient, and, so far, unsolved problem. My proposal was that those engaged in an enterprise might say to their employees, "Here is an enterprise, in the management and profits of which we ask you to become partners." I suggested that they should be to that extent recognised by their employers as human beings, and no longer as a mere factor in production, whose welfare should be the last thing to be considered. This was put forward by me and tossed aside—I want this to be remembered—by men who were endeavouring to find a way out of this *impasse*, which is working against the interests of the employees. This shows the success I met with in an endeavour to discover a formula by which we could divide the profits between the man on the one hand who takes the risk, and the one who does the work. Especially should we recall the success which has followed the efforts of those who have adopted similar methods for dealing with their employees. Senator J. D. Millen has mentioned the experiences of several commercial undertakings. In the Baldwin Works, in Philadelphia, the employees have worked in that huge undertaking from generation to generation, and there has never been a strike. That is the object lesson that presents itself to us to-day, and, if it is within the power of the Government to discover the correct equilibrium between employers and employees, they should exercise that power, with all the moral force at their command, and come right down into the arena by formulating a scheme whereby the employers who are sharing the profits with their employees shall have their taxation reduced on a

graduated scale. To those who are not prepared to adopt this policy, the Government should say, "You will have to pay a higher rate, and we, as the controlling authority, shall compel you to do so." It is a novel scheme, but it is one I have seriously considered, and which I believe would benefit not only the employer and employee, but the whole Commonwealth. Coming down to the other alternative of socialistic control, we do not have to inquire very far to ascertain what the result of that has been. It has been one of the most ghastly failures in the record of industrial endeavour. I have read of the experience of those who are engaged in socialistic undertakings in the neighbourhood of Boston, the details of which are well remembered by honorable senators. The result of those undertakings, according to the decisions finally reported, were that there were "too many philosophers and not enough potato-hoers."

Senator BAKHAP.—There were numerous socialistic undertakings in the United States of America.

Senator LYNCH.—Yes, and they all failed miserably. We all know what is going on in Russia, but at present we are too close to the picture to judge the results on their merits. I do not know where the Russian people are going to land, but there is every possibility of them again coming under the control of a dictator, and they will then be in a worse position than they ever were during the late Czar's régime.

I would not support the Government unless they were prepared to recognise that something should be done to meet the increased cost of living. I am supporting this Government in what they are about to do, and I trust they will do a fair and honest thing to their employees. In many instances, consideration has been too long delayed, but I am not going to support the Government if they are to take a false step, so to speak, and stifle industrial ambition in this country by granting high wages, without giving due consideration to those who have to bear the heat and burden of the day. If the proposed rate of £5 16s. per week were to be paid to the metalliferous miners employed on the Golden Mile, in Western Australia, it would mean that the mines would have to close down. Even if

we take into consideration the recent increase in the price of wheat, the payment of the basic wage mentioned by the Commission, would result in practically every farm in this country closing down.

Senator J. F. GUTHRIE.—And the people would be starving for bread.

Senator LYNCH.—There is no reason why one section of the community should have to struggle on, continually facing adverse circumstances in order to support other sections of the community by providing a cheap loaf. I am in favour of a line being drawn that will recognise and satisfy the frugal needs of every employee in the Commonwealth, but I am not in favour of extravagance. I have read with astonishment the lists which have been submitted to the Commission, but it has never been necessary for me to clothe myself in the way some people believe they should be clothed. Witnesses giving evidence before the Commission declared that a man should have at least two suits of clothes in two years, and an overcoat once in four years. I have had an overcoat for thirteen years. I do not wish to reflect in any way upon those who submitted evidence before the Commission, but it is time we got down to averages, and considered what is actually required in every-day life. It was said that neckties could not be purchased under 5s. each, but I have never had to pay that amount in my life.

Senator PEARCE.—You have not bought one lately.

Senator LYNCH.—The one I am wearing was purchased eight months ago.

Senator GARDINER.—You do not think they require such things?

Senator LYNCH.—I do not want my statements twisted or misconstrued; I can substantiate what I am saying before any Court in this land. I have seen the lists that have been supplied to the Commission, and I have compared them with the needs of the average frugal family in this country, and, in all earnestness, they are beyond what is actually needed. It is just as well to consider real facts. It is useless for the working men to endeavour to make his lot appear worse than it is, because over-stating the position will only be to his detriment. I know the position is really bad, but surely the merits of the case are sufficient to support it. I want the Government to travel a line that will not cripple or in any way impedes the wheels of indus-

try. I hold no brief for the moneyed classes of this community, and I know what they are because I have had dealings with them. This much I do know, and recognise, that we have a country which is being worked and exploited, and if nothing is done by this Government to improve the position of those who are producing wealth, they will be striking a severe blow against honest and ambitious men. I shall support the Government in saying that something tangible and justifiable should be done which will enable public servants to meet their obligations without experiencing unnecessary hardships.

**Senator PAYNE (Tasmania) [3.12].**—Although we have not anything definite before us in regard to the basic wage, it will be expected that honorable senators should give some expression of opinion concerning the matter, although they have very little information concerning the Commission's report. On the details outlined by the Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes) in another place, we could not be expected to express a definite opinion. From various quarters peremptory demands have been made upon honorable senators to state definitely and conclusively if they favoured the report of the Commission. These demands were submitted to us before the report was in the hands of the Prime Minister, and, consequently, we could not be expected to give any definite opinion. The Minister for Defence (Senator Pearce) tabled the document in the Senate only yesterday, and it is, therefore, impossible for us to express an opinion concerning its merits. The basic wage suggested by the Commission is very much in advance of the average wage which is being paid in Australia to-day. It must be recognised that a basic wage cannot in fairness be applied to only one section of the workers of Australia, because, if it were, it must necessarily follow, that efforts would be made—and justifiably so—to have it applied to others. The Commission, so far as I can gather, has not taken into consideration whether the money could be found to pay the rates suggested. It is stated that the basic wage, which varies in the different States, would enable the wage-earners of Australia to enjoy a greater degree of comfort. If a Commission had nothing outside of that to report upon, what is the use of the report? The Commission should also

have been asked to report upon the possibility of industrial operations being continued after the adoption of the basic wage recommended. Of course, there is no such suggestion in the report, because that was not one of the duties of the Commission, and so we are brought face to face with the fact that the Commission has recommended a certain basic wage to insure a certain degree of comfort for the workers, and, in the consideration of this problem, we must necessarily consider whether the industries of Australia, which we are all anxious to see developed and extended, can carry on if the basic wage has to be paid. One has to give a great deal of consideration to this question before he can answer it, and I say it is impossible, at this juncture, for any one to give a satisfactory answer. It would first be necessary to delve into the figures which have been prepared from time to time by boards of inquiry and committees concerning the industrial position of the Commonwealth and the ramifications of its various industries. Until we have collated and digested the figures bearing on this aspect of the problem, and can state with some degree of accuracy what proportion the basic wage will bear to the cost of production, we cannot possibly arrive at any satisfactory conclusion. One honorable senator who preceded me gave an interesting address on the value of co-operation. I believe he struck the right note, and stated a principle which, if seriously considered by the workers of Australia and put into practice, even in a small way for a beginning, would go far towards solving our difficulties. I have made statements from time to time during the last two years that co-operation on the part of the workers, especially in relation to commodities, is absolutely essential, and, in my opinion, only the difficulty of finding a capable organizer, a man of exceptional ability, has prevented the workers from adopting the principle. Many co-operative enterprises have been established throughout the Commonwealth, but comparatively few of them have been entirely successful. But there is no reason in the world why the workers of Australia should not co-operate with the object of securing the necessary commodities for their comfort at the lowest possible cost,

because the average working man—and I refer particularly to the married man with a family—finds it extremely difficult to make ends meet at present. In many cases there is absolutely no margin, after household expenses have been met, and surely, then, the time is ripe for co-operation by the workers in this direction.

I do not want to dwell at length upon the high cost of living, but I should like to refer to one special feature of Australian production that was brought prominently under my notice only a few days ago. With other honorable senators, I paid a visit to the Geelong Woollen Mills, and there saw tweeds of admirable quality, good enough for any man to wear, being turned out. This cloth, known as 6-quarter tweed, all wool, 56 inches in width, is worked up in decent patterns, and is being retailed to returned soldiers at 5s. 6d. a yard, which price, I was informed, shows a profit to the mill. Tweed of similar quality cannot be purchased from a retailer anywhere in Melbourne under at least 15s. to 18s. 6d. per yard. Material of this quality is absolutely essential for the comfort of the working classes and those dependent upon their weekly wages, and surely here is a splendid opening for co-operative effort on the part of the workers. One might enumerate many other instances in which co-operation to supply the needs of the people could be carried out successfully, if only the co-operators could secure the services of a capable organizer, a man able to put the affairs of a society on a sound business basis.

I do not want to say any more, except to indorse the hope so ably expressed by Senator Lynch, that the Government will give careful consideration to the report of the Basic Wage Commission. This, I take it, must be done in recess, because the Government will require time to carefully analyze the report. If the Government, after consideration of the report, reach the conclusion that our public servants are being underpaid, I hope they will take the necessary action to redress a grievance. Certain of the public servants have been very prominent lately in urging members of this Parliament, at a time when the report was not available to honorable senators, to promise to support the finding of the Basic Wage Commission. It may be

Senator Payne.

just as well to remind them that they are permanently established in their positions, and, subject to good behaviour, can safely rely upon employment for the whole of their working life-time.

Senator BAKHAP.—They are outside the realm of political patronage.

Senator PAYNE.—Exactly. That fact must not be lost sight of in dealing with this question. We cannot apply the basic wage, as suggested by the Commission, or, indeed, any basic wage to the Public Service without the outside workers being justified in putting forward a claim to similar treatment, in view of the fact that the latter are always confronted with the possibility of employment terminating any day, and also because of the fact that during prolonged illness they do not receive the same consideration from private employers. Consequently, the basic wage cannot with justice be applied to one section of the community and refused to another. That is my view of the position. To those telegrams and letters which I received from members of the Public Service, that were couched in courteous terms, I replied that the matter would receive my earnest and close consideration; but I absolutely refused to reply to any telegrams or letters which were, in my opinion, absolutely insulting in their language. I make that promise again publicly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

#### PAPERS.

The following papers were presented:—

War Service Homes Act—Land acquired in New South Wales at Goulburn, Greta, Murrickville, Tighe's Hill, Weston.

#### SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT.

Motion (by Senator PEARCE) agreed to—

That the Senate, at its rising, adjourn until 3 p.m. on a date to be fixed by Mr. President, which day of meeting shall be notified by Mr. President to each Senator by telegram or letter.

#### ADJOURNMENT.

VALEDICTORY — SENATE OFFICIALS' SELECT COMMITTEE—ATTITUDE OF PRESIDENT—CASE OF CAPTAIN J. STRASBURG: WAR GRATUITY.

Senator PEARCE (Western Australia—Minister for Defence [3.27].—In moving—

That the Senate do now adjourn,

I wish to say a few words in appreciation of the assistance rendered to my colleagues and myself by you, sir, and the Chairman of Committee in presiding over our deliberations in such a way as to facilitate the conduct of business. I also express the appreciation of the Government to honorable senators generally for their consideration, and for the impartial criticism bestowed by them upon the various measures. The session has been a very long and arduous one, and many useful and important measures have been dealt with. I think it will bear favorable comparison in that regard with any previous session, with the possible exception of the first, when many measures of first-class importance were passed. I may also remark that the work of the Senate is not to be judged by the length of time occupied. I have noticed a disposition in certain quarters to refer to the prompt manner in which the Senate does its work, and the inference, of course, is that measures do not receive full consideration. I venture to say, however, that an examination of the Bills dealt with will show that this is not the case. In this Chamber measures receive as much, if not more, consideration than is given to them in another branch of the Legislature. This is proved by the fact that so many of the Bills contain amendments inserted by the Senate. I would also like to express, on behalf of the Government, appreciation of the assistance rendered by the officers of the Senate and the staff, including *Hansard*, who have greatly facilitated the work of the Parliament. In conclusion, I wish to extend to you, sir, to the Chairman of Committees, to honorable senators generally, to *Hansard*, and officers of the Senate our best wishes for a Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year. I trust that when, early in the New Year, we meet again to face important problems that will then come up for consideration, we shall have benefited by the short recess, and be able, with fresh minds and renewed vigour, to undertake the duties which the country has imposed upon the Senate as one branch of the Legislature.

**Senator DE LARGIE** (Western Australia) [3.30].—I am very sorry that I cannot adopt a similar tone to that which has been adopted by the Minister for Defence (Senator Pearce). But I have a duty to perform of a somewhat

unpleasant character, and I should be guilty of moral cowardice if I endeavoured to shuffle out of it. It relates to a matter which arose out of a discussion in this Chamber some time ago concerning the payment of certain officers of the Parliament. Upon that occasion you, sir, made charges of a very serious character against one of those officers—a man who occupies a very humble position, but who is nevertheless as much entitled to justice as is the highest official in the Senate. Those charges were couched in language which could not be misunderstood. You, sir, affirmed that this officer had made lying statements to members of Parliament, and that he had made lying statements at home. You even went to the length of dragging his mother into the discussion by declaring that she had written complaining of the long hours which her son was obliged to work when there was no truth whatever in his statement. As I do not desire to be inaccurate, I propose to quote the exact words which you used in this connexion.

**Senator J. D. MILLEN.**—I think that this is most unfortunate, any way.

**Senator DE LARGIE.**—The honorable senator may think so, but he is not the judge of my responsibilities, and he had better care for his own opinions of what is fit and proper, and leave me to do the same thing for myself. I do not ask him to accept responsibility for anything that I say, and I do not think that it is fair for him to interject in that manner. If he has anything to say, let him say it, and accept responsibility for it just as I am always willing to do. He will not find me buttressing the case of a man who occupies a high position, and ignoring the claims of another who occupies a humble position. Upon the occasion to which I have referred, you, sir, are reported in *Hansard* to have said—

I want to point out further to the Committee that this boy has been running to members of this Parliament on both sides with lying complaints—I say advisedly and deliberately that he has made lying complaints—and if I had done my full duty I should have dismissed him long ago. Not only did he go with lying statements to members of this Parliament, but he made lying statements to his mother, because of which she wrote bitter complaints about her

son being kept here until 11 o'clock at night when he was getting off mostly at 4 o'clock every afternoon.

I have received a letter bearing upon this matter from the lad's mother. I have been acquainted with the family for many years, and I can therefore personally vouch for her honesty and respectability. When they hear her letter read, honorable senators will see how much truth there is in the statement which I have quoted, and which was made so deliberately that I cannot overlook it. I had no desire to raise this matter in the Senate, and I took another course in order to secure the object which I had in view by means of sworn evidence. My efforts in that direction, however, have been sidetracked in a manner which will prevent the matter being discussed until next year. The present, therefore, is the only occasion I shall have before the session closes of doing justice to this case. The letter which I have received from Mrs. Denholm reads—

I was very annoyed when I heard what had taken place in the Senate. Senator Givens' statement was that I wrote bitter complaints about my son making lying statements to me about his hours of duty. I can assure you that the statements are not only untrue, but unjust and cruel. Bob has always been a dutiful son, and has never given me any occasion to complain. I can assure you there is no truth in Senator Givens' statement. I would be obliged if you would ask Senator Givens, or any one else at Parliament House, to produce any letter in the terms stated. I have never written, or given authority to any one else to do so, and I strongly object to statements of that kind being made in public. I would be grateful if you would inquire into this matter for me.

Honorable members will note that that letter is emphatic enough. All that I have said is confirmed by it. Seeing that such a charge was made by the President, and that it had not been contradicted, I thought there was no other course open to me—my efforts to sift it to the bottom having been frustrated—but to ventilate it upon the floor of this chamber. Up to the present week I was under the impression that it might be possible for me to present the report of the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the treatment of Senate officials before the Christmas adjournment. That, however, has not been possible, and consequently I have brought the matter forward in this way. In dealing with it, I do not wish

to use stronger language than I have already employed. The points must be clear to everybody. It is a thousand pities that any man—especially one occupying the high position of President of the Senate—should use his office to make statements of such a character against a man who is employed in this building, and that he should go so far as to drag in his mother as a witness against him. Conduct of that kind cannot be too emphatically condemned, hence my reason for ventilating the matter upon the present occasion.

The PRESIDENT (Senator the Hon. T. Givens).—Before this discussion goes any farther, as Senator de Largie has made pointed reference to myself, I think that I should be afforded an opportunity of reply. It is rather unfortunate that an opportunity was not taken by the honorable senator to bring this matter forward in Committee, when I should have been able to combat his statements. During the present week, the Parliamentary Estimates were discussed in Committee, and every honorable senator is aware that I remained in the chamber until they were disposed of, in order that I might be present to reply to any criticism levelled against them, and to offer any information which honorable senators might desire. Unquestionably that was the proper time to ventilate every grievance, and to have it threshed out. It is very unfortunate for me—and somewhat unfortunate for the Senate—that Senator de Largie, in his personal bitterness, should be continually making venomous attacks upon me. Of course, I do not personally complain of that, but it is very unfortunate that the time of an august body like the Senate should be occupied with trivial matters of this kind. It is unfortunate, too, that I should have incurred Senator de Largie's displeasure. However, that is not my fault.

I may as well take the Senate into my confidence by telling it that the genesis of this trouble dates back to some six and a half or seven years ago. Ever since then it has not been possible—and it never will be possible—for me to do anything right in the estimation of Senator de Largie. I do not expect ever to be able to conduct any business—public or private—in a way that will meet with his approval. At that time there was a vacancy or vacancies upon the *Hansard*

Senator de Largie.

staff. Senator de Largie approached me with a request for consideration for a gentleman whom he thought was a suitable applicant for one of the positions. I suppose it was only a coincidence that that gentleman had just previously married one of Senator de Largie's daughters. I fully recognised that gentleman's good taste and good sense in falling in love with and marrying one of Senator de Largie's daughters, but apparently I am to be condemned for ever because I did not recognise that that gentleman's good taste and good sense did not constitute a paramount claim to be pitchforked into an office connected with this Parliament.

Senator DE LARGIE.—Will you explain exactly what transpired?

The PRESIDENT.—I will. The honorable senator spoke to me more than once about the matter.

Senator DE LARGIE.—What did I say?

The PRESIDENT.—The honorable senator asked me for full consideration for the claims of that gentleman. I went so far as to speak to the head of the Parliamentary Reporting Staff, Mr. Friend, upon the matter, and I told him the facts of the case. I informed him that the applicant in question was a connexion of Senator de Largie's, and I bespoke for him not merely fair consideration, but I went so far as to urge Mr. Friend to strain a point in favour of his selection if he could possibly do so without injury to the service. When the qualifications of the candidates were put before me by Mr. Friend, upon more than one occasion, I asked him particularly if he could not give a little more favourable consideration to the gentleman who had been recommended by Senator de Largie. He replied that he could not possibly recommend him in competition with the other applicants. In the face of that statement, I ask every reasonable man, what could I do? Should I have overridden the recommendation of the permanent head of the Department?

Senator DE LARGIE.—Did I ever complain of that?

The PRESIDENT.—The honorable senator complained bitterly, was very angry, and told me emphatically that his son-in-law did not get a fair deal.

Senator DE LARGIE.—I did nothing of the kind. That statement is not correct.

The PRESIDENT.—I did not interject whilst the honorable senator was making a bitter attack upon me. I am giving the genesis of that attack, and I ask him to be silent, as I was when he was addressing the Senate.

Senator DE LARGIE.—Then stick to the truth!

The PRESIDENT.—The honorable senator must also be respectful in his interjections. I have now given the genesis of the trouble, and I am confident that honorable senators who know me quite as well as does Senator de Largie, will accept my word.

In regard to the particular case mentioned by Senator de Largie, there are several gentlemen connected with the parliamentary service who saw the letter written by Mrs Denholm, which he says was never written. I can name two of them from memory. They are the Clerk of the Senate, Mr. Monahan, and the steward of the refreshment-room, Mr. Field.

Senator DE LARGIE.—Produce the letter.

The PRESIDENT.—It is not mine to produce. I cannot produce what is somebody else's property.

Senator DE LARGIE.—I thought so.

The PRESIDENT.—That is the position, and my word and that of the two gentlemen whom I have mentioned, will be accepted in this matter. In regard to my charge that this boy had made lying statements, I now repeat it. He was continually running to members of Parliament with lying statements. He was constantly stating that he was receiving only £2 14s. per week, and bitter complaints were made in both Houses upon that account. But his statement was not in accordance with the facts. The truth is, that he was receiving a fixed wage of £2 14s. per week. But on top of that he was getting his meals at the refreshment-room free—that represented a considerable sum—and on top of that, again, he was being paid a bonus. In that way he was receiving a higher rate of pay than had been fixed by any Arbitration Court award for similar work outside. The moment the Arbitration Court awarded lift attendants in the

Postal Department £182 per annum, his salary was raised to that amount, although the award was not applied in the general Public Service to any branch except that for which it was given. In the face of these facts I ask how anybody can say that this young man has been unjustly treated.

Senator DE LARGIE.—Confine yourself to the Denholm case, which I brought up. Produce your proofs.

The PRESIDENT.—The honorable senator never notified me that he was going to bring up the case. He failed to bring it up when there was a full opportunity of referring to the matter over and over again, and when I could have produced all the proofs that he could want. Again, communications have been given, and copies of those communications have been in the possession of members, which could only have come from Denholm. That, I say, is contrary to the Public Service Act. This boy is not in the Public Service at all. He is a mere temporary employee.

Senator DE LARGIE.—Of nine years' standing.

The PRESIDENT.—That is due to my kindness to the boy in allowing him to remain so long as a temporary employee, because, after all, it is really a question whether his services are actually necessary, seeing that the lift is an automatic one. In any case, it would be a much more suitable job for a one-legged or a one-armed soldier than for a man in possession of all his faculties.

Senator DE LARGIE.—He is not in possession of all his faculties, as you know. He has a lame hand.

The PRESIDENT.—I do not know. At any rate he has received exceptional kindness and good treatment from me all the time. It appears that, because he and his family are either very old acquaintances or friends, or possibly connexions, of Senator de Largie, the Senate is to be continually bothered with his case. First, I am to fall into Senator de Largie's disfavour because his son-in-law could not get everything that he thought he ought to get, and, in the second place, because a connexion, or friend of old standing, of Senator de Largie cannot get everything he expects.

Senator DE LARGIE.—That will not go down. We know you, Givens, too well.

The PRESIDENT.—The honorable senator will kindly address me in a respectful manner. I am in the chair. The honorable senator declined, or refused, or neglected to give me an opportunity to meet him on equal terms on the floor of the Senate. While I am in the chair he will be respectful to me.

Senator DE LARGIE.—It was my only opportunity.

The PRESIDENT.—The honorable senator had a full opportunity when the Estimates were before the Committee of the Senate. The subject could then have been discussed from Dan to Beersheba, and the honorable senator could have returned to it over and over again.

Senator DE LARGIE.—You know that the report of the Committee had to be brought in, and you know that it was side-tracked.

The PRESIDENT.—The report of the Committee has nothing to do with the Denholm case.

Senator DE LARGIE.—It should have had, and would have had but for your side-tracking.

The PRESIDENT.—That question is not in dispute.

Senator DE LARGIE.—It will be in dispute.

The PRESIDENT.—I was hoping that the honorable senator would bring it up to-day, because I brought the authorities, and was prepared for it.

Senator DE LARGIE.—You know very well that it would not be in order for me to bring it up to-day.

The PRESIDENT.—I should have been prepared to give to the honorable senator every facility and opportunity to do so. As the motion for the adjournment of the Senate has to be put at 4 o'clock, and as I know that Senator Gardiner desires to bring a question forward, I do not propose to take up any more time in the discussion of this matter.

Senator GARDINER (New South Wales) [3.49].—I am very much obliged to you, Mr. President, for giving me an opportunity to bring forward a matter which I previously placed before the Senate. I then read a number of communications that, to my mind, conclusively proved that an officer who has rendered valuable services to Australia had been badly treated in being refused his war gratuity. The Minister for Defence (Senator Pearce) promised to send

my statement on to the Minister for the Navy (Mr. Laird Smith), and this, I think, he did; but as no result has come from it, I wish again to emphasize the facts. Then, if the Minister for the Navy does not deal with the case satisfactorily, I believe that, when we meet again, the sense of justice of the Senate will lead them to appoint a Select Committee to inquire into it. Briefly, the facts are that Captain Strasburg was engaged in the first military expedition to Rabaul. Here is a quotation from the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 14th October, 1914—

VESSELS CAPTURED.

Several attempts were made to discover the s.s. *Meklong*, a small twin screw steamer of the N.D.L. Fleet, which, according to information gleaned by Captain J. Strasburg, who accompanied the *Berrima* as pilot, and knows the islands better, probably, than any man living, was hidden somewhere on Duke of York Island. So cunningly was she concealed, however, in a creek, amid a profusion of cocoanut palms, that she was not found till Captain Strasburg, who had now been placed in command of her himself, headed the search. Here is a letter from Colonel Holmes to Rear-Admiral Sir William Creswell, dated 5th March, 1915—

This will serve to introduce to you Mr. J. Strasburg, who acted as pilot on the troopship *Berrima* while in New Guinea waters. He was engaged by the Naval authorities, and is now, I understand, meeting with some difficulty in obtaining a settlement. He wishes to see you and explain his case. Captain Stevenson can speak as to the service Strasburg rendered to the Navy, and as Administrator I cannot speak too highly of the assistance he rendered in connexion with the establishment of an inter-island trade service.

This is another letter from Colonel Holmes to Colonel Pethebridge, dated 26th February, 1915—

The services rendered by Strasburg were very useful, as at first none of our people knew anything of the islands, and as it is now clear that the Navy agreed to pay him pilotage while on the *Berrima*, in addition to his salary—

I wish to emphasize those words—

I suppose it is only fair that he should get the same treatment from the Administration while in its employ, particularly as the Navy still paid his salary to the date of his leaving Rabaul.

All I wish to establish is that a man who was a member of the Expedition, and rendered very valuable services, is now refused the war gratuity on the ground that being a foreigner—he is a Swede or Norwegian, or of some such nationality—

he could not be a member of the Forces. He was taken on the strength of the Expedition with the rank of acting-lieutenant, and I do not think it is fitting for the Commonwealth to treat unfairly people who render it valuable service. Here is a quotation from the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 21st November, 1914—

The expedition left Rabaul with Captain Strasburg as navigator, Major Heritage having command of the dispositions, both naval and military. Lieutenant Holmes, son of the Administrator, went as Acting Commissioner for New Ireland.

This article was written at the very time the events were happening. It included also the following passage:—

Late that evening we set sail for Garden Island, 70 miles down the coast, where the German traders were supposed to be in hiding. A word of congratulation may very well be vouchsafed Captain Strasburg, the G.O.M. of the Pacific Ocean navigators. The splendid manner in which our craft was taken through uncharted waters, strewn with coral reefs, is indicative of the magnificent hold our captain has over marine science. What is even more remarkable is the fact that the skipper possessed neither sextant nor log, and had to rely on dead reckoning.

There is also the following statement:—

A glance at our prizes revealed the *Siar*, 550 tons, the *Matupi*, a new auxiliary schooner of about 250 tons, and the *Sentar*, a smaller boat about 100 tons in size.

I merely wish to ask that justice be done to a man who, I think, is entitled to justice. Those were the prizes taken by the Expedition, the navigation part of which was under Captain Strasburg, who was acting-lieutenant when the *Berrima* left Sydney with the Rabaul expedition.

Instead of the Government hiding behind the fact that this man, on account of being a foreigner, could not be given the appointment they promised him, with the rank of lieutenant, all I ask is that they will do the fair thing by going fully into his case, and if they find that he rendered the services which the papers in the Department of the Navy show that he did render, I ask them to pay his gratuity money. That, I think, is not expecting too much. I believe the Senate will support me in moving for the appointment of a Select Committee, if this grave injustice continues after the approaching adjournment. I know that the British Admiralty pay prize-money for all captured vessels, but I do not think that Captain Strasburg has received

a shilling, although it is clearly shown in evidence that the capture of three or four of these vessels was due to the skill and ability he displayed while acting as officer on board one of the British ships. I recognise that this case does not come within the Department of the Minister for Defence. If it had done so, I believe it would have been settled before this. Those at the head of the Navy Department will not get any credit in Australia for trying to side-step an honest debt by the plea that there is a difficulty in the way of fulfilling the promise of the Government because the man is not British born, and, therefore, could not become an officer in the British Navy. If he was not an officer, what was he? He was in their employ, he took the risks, and rendered valuable service, and now that the war gratuity is being paid out to all and sundry, I submit that he is entitled to it also. Will the Minister for Defence go into the papers, and try to have this most deserving case promptly dealt with?

I hope I shall be forgiven for having overlooked, while stating this case, all the nice things the Minister for Defence said regarding yourself, Mr. President, the Chairman of Committees, and the officers and staff. I indorse all that he has said, and join in wishing you and the whole of the staff a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

**Senator PEARCE** (Western Australia—Minister for Defence [4.54]).—On a previous occasion I referred the papers and Senator Gardiner's representations in Captain Strasburg's case to the Minister for the Navy (Mr. Laird Smith). I shall see that the remarks made by Senator Gardiner to-day are also brought under that Minister's notice. It may be that the Department of the Navy is taking up the attitude that, technically speaking, this gentleman is not entitled to a war gratuity. If that is so, I will ask the Minister for the Navy to consider whether he can see his way on the facts—and I do not propose to pass any judgment on them—to recommend Parliament to vote a sum of money to Captain Strasburg for the services he has rendered, if he is not entitled, technically speaking, to the war gratuity.

**The PRESIDENT (Senator the Hon. T. Givens).**—In putting the motion, I desire to indorse the remarks of the

Minister for Defence (Senator Pearce) and the Leader of the Opposition (Senator Gardiner) as to the good wishes which we entertain towards each other for a Happy Christmas and a prosperous time in the years to come. I express my gratitude for the hearty assistance and goodwill that I have received generally from the members of the Senate, and also my appreciation of the officers of the Senate, the *Hansard* staff, and every one else for the splendid services they have rendered in a long and somewhat arduous session. I hope that, after the strain they have experienced, they will be able to enjoy a good holiday and come back like giants refreshed for the continuation of the session next year. I extend to all my felicitations for the Christmas season.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Senate adjourned at 3.57 p.m.

## House of Representatives.

Friday, 26 November, 1920.

**Mr. SPEAKER (Hon. Sir Elliot Johnson)** took the chair at 11 a.m., and read prayers.

### BASIC WAGE: PUBLIC SERVANTS.

**Mr. HECTOR LAMOND.**—I ask the Leader of the House whether he has seen a telegram sent by Mr. O'Connor, regarding an alleged promise of the Prime Minister, and whether any such promise was made.

**Sir JOSEPH COOK.**—Yes. I myself received a telegram from Mr. O'Connor. The moment I became aware that these telegrams were being received by members, I telegraphed to the Prime Minister, asking him whether Mr. O'Connor's statements were correct.

**Mr. J. H. CATTS.**—We had the same denials regarding the War Gratuity.

**Sir JOSEPH COOK.**—All I have to say about Mr. O'Connor is that I would hardly take his word if it were uncorroborated. I speak from my own experience of him. He tried, the other day, to put statements into my mouth which were

not correct. This is the reply that I received from the Prime Minister—

Statement by O'Connor absolutely untrue. Beyond telling O'Connor that I would not see him—

I suppose that that relates to the station incident—

I have never spoken to him in my life.

An unqualified and absolute denial.

Mr. LAVELLE.—No one would take the Prime Minister's word, nor yours either.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—More insults.

### HIGH COMMISSIONER.

Mr. RILEY.—Has the Treasurer seen the paragraph in this morning's newspapers intimating that Mr. Fisher has been given three months' leave of absence, with a view to Senator Millen taking over his duties?

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—Yes, and my reply is the same as yesterday: I do not know anything about the matter.

### LEAD ORE.

#### EMBARGO ON EXPORTATION.

Mr. GREGORY.—Some time ago a deputation from the Country party waited on the Prime Minister, and was assured that no further embargoes would be placed on the export of produce from Australia. Recently, however, I received from the Solicitor-General an intimation that an embargo would be placed on the export of lead ore from Western Australia. I ask the Leader of the House whether he will promise that this matter shall be definitely brought before Cabinet, and consideration given to my request that exportation may be free.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I know nothing about the matter, but I think that I may make the promise for which the honorable member asks.

### EX-WARRANT OFFICER LITTLE.

Mr. MAKIN.—On the 14th September I brought before the Assistant Minister for Defence certain circumstances connected with the return from the Front of ex-Warrant Officer Little, and asked that an inquiry might be made into his case. The honorable gentleman promised that he would institute an inquiry, and

go carefully into the matter. I have now received from the Defence Department a communication saying that the Department cannot see its way to institute a Court of Inquiry, as requested. I wish to know if that is the Department's last word on the case, and if this man is not to be given an opportunity of putting the circumstances of his return from abroad before a tribunal.

Sir GRANVILLE RYRIE.—I have given a great deal of care and thought to this case, and have had it before my executive officers for a long time. It has been threshed out as thoroughly as a case could be threshed out, and I regret to have to say that the conclusion arrived at is that nothing more can be done.

### WAR SERVICE HOMES.

#### PURCHASE OF TIMBER.

Mr. FOWLER laid on the table an interim report of the Joint Committee of Public Accounts upon the purchase of saw-mills and timber areas in Queensland.

Ordered to be printed.

### WAR GRATUITY.

Mr. McGRATH.—In to-day's newspaper it is stated that a number of soldiers who have received their discharge in Great Britain invaded the High Commissioner's office, demanding cash for their war gratuity bonds, and left only on being promised that within a day or two £25 in cash would be made available to them. If that statement be true, is the Government going to make £25 in cash available to those soldiers who fulfilled their contract and returned to Australia?

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—This very troublesome question crops up about ten times every day.

Mr. MAHONY.—Then why do you not solve it?

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I am prepared to consider expedients. One suggestion is that the honorable member should surrender his salary. That would provide a cash gratuity for ten soldiers.

Mr. MAHONY.—If the Prime Minister will surrender his £25,000, I will give up my £1,000.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—My answer to the question is that I know nothing about the facts, but I think what took place had

relation, not to the cashing of the war gratuity, but to the repatriation of stranded persons.

Mr. CHARLTON.—Is the Treasurer aware that a large number of applications for cash have been under consideration as long as three months, and will he ask the Board to expedite action, because some of the persons concerned are in needy circumstances?

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I am asking every day in my life for that to be done, but I shall ask again.

#### TAXATION COMMISSION.

Mr. FLEMING.—In view of the fact that the Commission investigating the adjustment of taxation is to sit in all the State capitals, I ask the Treasurer what steps, if any, have been taken to bring those who represent primary production into touch with it?

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I am quite unaware, but I shall make inquiry and let the honorable member know.

#### QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE.

Mr. SPEAKER.—I again draw the attention of the House, as unfortunately I have had to do only too frequently during this session, to the fact that the asking and answering of questions should be listened to in silence, without interjections of any kind. I remind honorable members also that it is only questions on urgent matters of public importance that should be asked without notice. The system which has grown up of seeking to argue and debate subjects on questions without notice gives rise to more disorder than do any of the other proceedings in this Chamber.

#### SHIPBUILDING AT WALSH ISLAND.

Mr. WATKINS.—As the House is about to go into recess, and as I understand that all but one union have signed up under the shipping agreement, I ask the Minister for Home and Territories if he will consider the suggestion that the Ministry should examine the contract with the New South Wales Government for the ships that are to be tendered for and built on Walsh Island? It will be

a few months before we meet again, and everything may be in the melting-pot in the meantime.

Mr. POYNTON.—I have explained to the honorable member that the delay which has occurred has been in consequence of the attitude of the unions themselves; otherwise, this matter might have been finalized long ago. As to the going on with the building of the large ships at Walsh Island, I cannot give a promise, seeing that a revised tender was at a price something like £17 a ton in excess of that which was first agreed upon, and which I had announced to the House. Before I do anything, honorable members will be given an opportunity to come to a decision on the matter.

#### ORDNANCE STORES EMPLOYEES.

Mr. MAKIN.—Will the Assistant Minister for Defence have inquiries instituted regarding the wages and conditions ruling in the Ordnance Stores?

Sir GRANVILLE RYRIE.—I shall have inquiries made.

#### PACIFIC ISLANDS MAIL SERVICE.

Mr. FENTON.—Serious complaints are made about the service to the Pacific Islands carried on by Messrs. Burns, Philp, and Company. It is said that the Government gave to that firm the right to carry mails, and to do other business with the Pacific Islands, without calling for tenders, and that the firm does not deal out even-handed justice to shippers. It is complained that certain financial interests control its operations, and receive advantages over smaller shippers. Will the Leader of the Government promise, on behalf of the Prime Minister, that an inquiry shall be made into the allegations, and have things rectified so that all shippers may be on an equal footing, no monied men being given preference?

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I certainly shall have inquiries made. Notwithstanding the complaints that have been made concerning this company by shippers in the islands, the fact remains that it has done wonderful pioneering work there. I do not know what we should have done regarding these islands but for this same much-maligned firm.

Mr. FENTON.—The firm has big interests in the islands.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—Of course, if the company is doing anything wrong nowadays they must be stopped, and I shall have inquiries made.

### WOOL-SCOURING INDUSTRY.

Mr. LISTER.—I have on more than one occasion brought under the notice of the Prime Minister the very unsatisfactory position in which those engaged in the wool-scouring industry find themselves to-day. The position has been for a considerable time very difficult, and I wish to know from the Leader of the House whether some effort will be made for supplies of skins in order to keep men in something like decent employment, and so obviate the appalling distress with which they are threatened?

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I regret the inconvenience that has been caused in the way suggested by the honorable member. When the Prime Minister returns to Melbourne I shall make him acquainted with the honorable member's remarks.

### MILITARY OFFENDERS IN GAOL.

Mr. McGRAH.—Has the Assistant Minister for Defence made any further inquiries into the cases of those military offenders who are now confined in Pentridge Gaol, and does he intend to take any action with a view to their release at an early date?

Sir GRANVILLE RYRIE.—I promised the House a short time ago that I would look into the cases of those men confined at Pentridge, but I really have not had time to do so. During this week I have been fully occupied with the work of the Department, in addition to the work in the House, but I intend to visit Pentridge, as I promised, and see if anything can be done.

Mr. WEST.—Does that promise apply also to military prisoners in Sydney?

Sir GRANVILLE RYRIE.—I shall take similar steps in Sydney.

### REPATRIATION.

#### SOLDIERS' CO-OPERATIVE ENTERPRISES.

Mr. BRUCE.—Can the Assistant Minister for Repatriation tell the House if anything has yet been done with regard

to the authorized advances, on the basis of £1 for £1, to soldiers' co-operative enterprises? Is it a fact that the regulations under which such advances may be made have not yet been issued, and that, in consequence, applications are held up?

Mr. RODGERS.—The position with regard to these advances is surrounded with difficulty to a much greater degree than the House could have foreseen. My own opinion is that some important change will have to be made in the Act to render it effective. Up to date very little has been done.

Mr. BRUCE.—Has anything been done?

Mr. RODGERS.—I am not in a position to say, but I think that very little, if anything, has been done. I am bound to say that, in my opinion, the Act is not sufficiently effective to carry out the intention of Parliament, and at the first opportunity I shall bring under the notice of the Government a proposal for an amendment of it.

Mr. BRUCE.—In view of the very unsatisfactory statement by the Assistant Minister for Repatriation, will the Leader of the House undertake that the difficulties spoken of are immediately considered by the Cabinet? Some endeavour should be made to find a way out, in view of the fact that the Department has not taken the trouble to ask this House to amend the legislation, which apparently cannot be carried out in the way we intended.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I do not think the honorable member should say that. This is the first I have heard of any trouble regarding the Act as it affects soldiers' co-operative enterprises.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—But nothing has been done at all under the Act.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I know, but I was not aware that a defect in the Act was the cause of the trouble.

Mr. BRUCE.—I am only asking the Government to find a way out of the difficulty immediately.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I can only say that the matter will be taken into consideration.

Mr. RODGERS.—It has already been considered by the Law authorities.

Mr. BRENNAN.—Here is another Minister "butting" in!

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—That Minister has charge of Repatriation, and has a

right to "butt" in; and he has already told the House a fact of which I was not aware, namely, that there is some defect in the Act which requires remedying. The sooner it is remedied the better.

#### OLD-AGE AND INVALID PENSIONS.

Mr. RILEY.—In view of the facts laid before the Government during this week in regard to the high cost of living, will the Treasurer take immediate steps to increase the old-age and invalid pensions before the House rises to-day? Will the right honorable gentleman introduce a resolution giving the Government the necessary power?

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I am afraid I cannot do so at present.

Mr. WEST.—The Treasurer apparently requires time to consider means of raising further revenue, and as the House is about to go into recess, and I shall, consequently, have some time at my disposal, I am willing to give him any assistance I can in the matter.

Mr. SPEAKER.—Order! Order!

#### WIRELESS TELEPHONY.

##### EXPERIMENTS IN PARLIAMENT HOUSE.

Mr. BRENNAN.—Mr. Speaker, I desire to address a question to yourself without notice. It is not so much a matter of urgency, but I hope you will pardon the question, seeing that the recess is soon to deprive us, if I may say so, of your genial society. I desire to ask you a question with regard to these mysterious instruments which are suspended from the roof. Are they not, in a certain manner, an invasion of the privileges of honorable members, inasmuch as they are intended to convey their speeches directly from this Chamber to people outside? Am I correctly informed, in particular, that the one hanging over the head of the honorable member for Barrier (Mr. Considine) is specially intended to enable the Prime Minister to hear the speeches of that gentleman without running the risk of coming into the Chamber?

Mr. SPEAKER (Hon. Sir Elliot Johnson).—I am afraid that the honorable member has not been correctly informed in regard to every particular. Of course, if there is serious objection to this experi-

ment being made, it will be discontinued, but a representative of the Wireless Telephony Company sought permission to make it in this Chamber, with a view to seeing if it be possible to transmit the speeches made here to other portions of the building, and the temporary test is being made in the Prime Minister's room. I do not know with what degree of success the experiment has met, but honorable members might find it convenient, later on, perhaps, if wireless reports of their speeches could be conveyed to their own rooms without imposing on them the necessity of coming into the Chamber.

Mr. HIGGS.—It might be extended to honorable members' constituents.

Mr. SPEAKER.—That is so. I must confess that, personally, I can see some advantage in such an arrangement, and it might relieve me from some of the unpleasant tasks which sometimes devolve upon me when delegates are of a heated character.

#### ARBITRATION AWARDS.

##### PRESENTATION TO PARLIAMENT.

Mr. LAVELLE.—In view of the fact that the session is about to end, and of the necessity for certain arbitration awards to lie on the table of the House for some time before they take effect, will the Leader of the House make arrangements to-day to have these awards recently delivered by Mr. Justice Starke laid on the table, so that, along with others, they may become operative from July. If these awards are not laid on the table, and the session closes to-day, payment cannot be made under them until a month after we meet next year.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—Whether or not the awards are laid on the table, their operation will not be interfered with. If necessary, the Government will come to Parliament and ask for indemnification for any action they may take to give effect to them, so the honorable member may, therefore, be quite easy in his mind. Some have already been laid on the table, and nothing will be allowed to interfere with the operation of any of them. I am not sure that I have not heard some people asking that these awards be not laid on the table of the House—that they be not approved.

## PORT MORESBY HOSPITAL.

Dr. MALONEY.—Since I took my seat here this morning I have received the following telegram:

Massed public meeting Port Moresby 10th, following resolution carried unanimously:—"That citizens protest against actions of administrator in denying Dr. Mathews the right to attend his patients in Port Moresby Hospital, and demand that Dr. Mathews be given the right to visit and attend his patients in hospital. Nursing staff and wardsmen not in any way discriminate between patients in hospital, notwithstanding who their doctor may be, and that Dr. Mathews as private practitioner be given the same right Government drugs in his private practice as allowed all Government medical officers, which he had when attending private patients during his term of office as Government Medical Officer."

(Sgd.) CHAIRMAN CITIZEN ASSOCIATIONS.

Will the Minister for Home and Territories ascertain whether the statements contained in that telegram can be verified? It is stated that white people are refused admission to the hospital, although it is the only one to which they can go, and that they are not allowed to have the attendance of their own medical man.

Mr. POYNTON.—I am fully conversant with the matter referred to by the honorable member. I have already given a decision that Dr. Mathews is not to carry on his private practice in the hospital.

Dr. MALONEY.—Then you will have a revolution there before you are aware!

## SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT.

## BASIC WAGE DEBATE.

Motion (by Sir JOSEPH COOK) proposed—

That the House, at its rising, adjourn until a date and hour to be fixed by Mr. Speaker, which time of meeting shall be notified by Mr. Speaker to each member by telegram or letter.

Mr. TUDOR (Yarra) [11.31].—If this part of the session is closed to-day and we are to stand adjourned until March or April next, honorable members will not be given the opportunity of discussing the report of the Basic Wage Commission—one of the most important papers ever tabled in this House. As honorable members have a right to discuss that report, I shall vote against the motion.

Mr. MAHONY (Dalley) [11.32].—I think we ought to have some information

from the Government as to when the House will meet again, because there are some very important matters on the business-paper for consideration, the most important being the question of the basic wage, a matter which cannot be dealt with properly in three or four hours.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—Why should we not meet to-morrow?

Mr. MAHONY.—If this motion is carried and the House adjourns this afternoon or to-night, there will be no to-morrow. I object strongly to the motion, because if it is carried it will only give us one or two hours in which to discuss this most important question of what should be the living wage for our public servants and for employees generally throughout the Commonwealth. The only alternative is to sit all to-night and right through to-morrow, and perhaps to-morrow night, until we eventually conclude the debate.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—Last night the honorable member voted to sit all night to discuss this matter.

Mr. MAHONY.—Yes, but last night the proposal was quite different. We could have gone on with the debate and then adjourned it and met again, but if this motion is carried there will be no further sitting of the House until next year, and we shall be precluded from discussing the basic wage question unless we unduly extend this sitting in order to do so. I am strongly opposed to this motion. I think the House should proceed in the ordinary way to do the business before it. The Government and those supporting them are greatly mistaken if they think that the closing of this part of the session will solve the great problem of the living wage for the people of Australia. It is simply the attitude of the ostrich, which sticks its head in the sand, thinking that by doing so it has solved the problem of how to escape from its pursuers. We may adjourn, but this great problem will still be facing us. Industrial affairs are becoming so unsettled in Australia that it becomes more necessary every day to make an attempt to solve this question, otherwise serious consequences will ensue to the people generally. It is useless to play the ostrich trick of closing Parliament, saying, "That solves the difficulty." By discussing the question in a fair and open way we may arrive at a decision that will

insure to the people of Australia a decent degree of comfort in their general conditions of living.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—May I, by leave, remove a misapprehension?

Mr. SPEAKER.—If the right honorable gentleman speaks now he closes the debate on this motion.

Mr. McWILLIAMS (Franklin) [11.37].—I hope the Treasurer will not press this motion.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—Seeing that I am not permitted to make a statement, may I say, by way of interjection, that the Government have no idea of closing the debate on the basic wage question in any shape or form. If honorable members wish to continue sitting this afternoon and through the night, the Government are prepared to sit with them, and to-morrow also.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—That would be a very unwise thing to do. Undoubtedly the public of Australia are very much agitated over the question of the basic wage. I moved the adjournment of the debate yesterday because I thought it advisable to have such an important matter discussed at an all-night sitting, and I would very much prefer to have it discussed until a reasonable hour this evening, and then again to-morrow morning, until the debate is concluded. Nothing will give a certain class of the community stronger cause for complaint than the fact that this Parliament, with such an important question before it, has rushed it through at an all-night sitting, as the motion suggests. When this sitting concludes this part of the session ends, and honorable members will not be called together until Mr. Speaker, in his wisdom, summons us to meet again.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—While the honorable member is discussing this question, will he kindly tell us just what he thinks can be done by a discussion of the report of the Basic Wage Commission at the present juncture?

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—If nothing can be done by discussing the matter, why has it been introduced in this House and turmoil created all over Australia? The Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes) deliberately moved that the report of the Commission be printed for the purpose, as he put it, of having the question discussed.

He has made a lengthy statement upon the question, and the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Tudor) has done the same, and the remarks of both will be read all over Australia. Any attempt to close Parliament with an all-night sitting debate on this matter would be such an exceedingly dangerous course that I think the House ought not to contemplate it.

Mr. FENTON (Maribyrnong) [11.40].—I agree with the sentiments expressed by the honorable member for Franklin (Mr. McWilliams), but I do not agree with the method he has suggested for discussing this very important question of the basic wage—the most important ever launched in Australia. In response to a deputation the Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes) announced in his policy speech at Bendigo—and his promise was repeated by all of his followers—that certain steps would be taken to fix the cost of living, and a Basic Wage Commission has been for ten months engaged on the task of deciding what is the cost of living in Australia. Having concluded its labours, it has now presented its report to Parliament, and it is the duty of Parliament, I take it, to solve the question in accordance with the terms of the Commission's report. But instead of the House devoting sufficient time and proper hours to the consideration of this problem, the suggestion is made that we should sit on to-day and perhaps to-morrow to deal with it. The proposal does not appeal to me. This House, if it takes the report of the Basic Wage Commission seriously, and has any realization of the true position, will adjourn at a proper hour this afternoon and meet next week at a proper time; and if the matter cannot be settled next week, it will sit here during the following week and continue sitting until the subject is finally disposed of. In that way we shall be carrying out the duty which we are supposed to perform. We must have a reasonable time for discussing this matter. We are not yet on the eve of Christmas. I know that honorable members whose homes are far removed from Melbourne are anxious to get away, but they must realize that never before has so important a problem confronted them. Yet we are asked to settle it in a few hours' discussion or continue sitting all night and all to-morrow, and then adjourn for three or

four months with the question still unsolved. What will occur in the intervening months? There is a state of ferment among both employers and employees in regard to this question. Are we to expect them to remain in a calm state of mind for three months while Parliament takes a holiday, shirking its duty upon the most important matter ever submitted to it? Let the motion be withdrawn and let those honorable members who want to go to their homes do so, while those who remain in Melbourne can meet here next week and the following week, and, if necessary, continue sitting right until Christmas if, by doing so, this important problem can be solved.

**Mr. HECTOR LAMOND** (Illawarra) [11.44].—If sitting here next week, the week after, and through the Christmas holidays would mean the solving of this problem, and it is regarded as unsolvable otherwise, the desire of every honorable member would be to continue sitting; but so far from that being the fact, while these vehement speeches, addressed with one eye on Parliament and the other eye on the great Public Service vote, are being indulged in, the Government are being deprived of the opportunity of determining the amount of wages to be paid to the public servants. Honorable members seem to approach this matter under the assumption that the Government have not come to any decision upon it. As a matter of fact, the Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes) announced on the floor of this House that Commonwealth public servants would be paid a basic wage as from 1st November of this year, and all the talk we may indulge in for days will not alter that fact.

**Mr. GABB.**—He did not say that.

**Mr. HECTOR LAMOND.**—I am repeating what the Prime Minister said. He stated that the Public Service would be paid a basic wage as from 1st November. The amount is to be decided by the Government on the basis of the determination of Mr. Justice Higgins.

**Mr. SPEAKER.**—Order! The honorable member will not be in order in discussing upon this motion the subject of the basic wage.

**Mr. HECTOR LAMOND.**—I do not wish to do so, but I point out that the debate on the basic

wage is delaying the determination of the Government, and that, therefore, we ought to agree to this motion. It ought to be made clear to the public servants that we cannot help them, and are not helping them one whit, by sitting on here discussing the matter. The Government policy has been definitely announced, and it will be carried out whether the debate proceeds in this Chamber for a week or three weeks.

**Mr. RYAN** (West Sydney) [11.47].—I hope the Treasurer will not press his motion, or, if he does, that it will be defeated. It is extraordinary that the right honorable gentleman should have moved it at the outset of a very important discussion. His motion means, in other words, that Parliament, on the rising of the House, shall be practically prorogued. Would it not be better for the Government to wait until the debate upon the basic wage has proceeded, at any rate, until some stage this afternoon, by which time they might be in a position to know whether finality can be reached and a specific announcement made? I do not wish to repeat the cogent and forcible arguments advanced by honorable members on this side; and I need scarcely remind honorable members that this very important public matter is one that is agitating the minds of many thousands throughout Australia. It behoves Parliament, then, to give that attention to the subject which the public expect of us. My reasons for speaking as I do are fortified by the fact that I have received a telegram, in common with other honorable members, despatched from Sydney last evening. It contains a message to the effect that the Prime Minister stated to a deputation in Sydney—

**Mr. BAYLEY.**—It does not say that.

**Mr. RYAN.**—Obviously, other honorable members have received a similar message, which is to the effect that the Prime Minister told a deputation that if twenty-four honorable members were willing to remain—

**Mr. BAYLEY.**—That statement was made in this House.

**Mr. HECTOR LAMOND.**—And was inconsistent with the decision of the Government.

**Mr. RYAN.**—It is inconsistent, because the Prime Minister is constantly doing and saying things which are inconsistent with the policy of the Government.

**Sir JOSEPH COOK.**—The Prime Minister says this is an absolute untruth.

**Mr. RYAN.**—If the Prime Minister has said that he never used those words—

**Sir JOSEPH COOK.**—His message reads, “statement by O’Connor absolutely untrue.”

**Mr. RYAN.**—That, however, does not alter the need for honorable members to apply themselves to the consideration of the basic wage, and for them to see to it before the House rises that the pledge of the Government is given effect to. It is all very well for the honorable member for Illawarra (Mr. Hector Lamond) to argue that we will not benefit public servants or the industries of this country by sitting on here, debating this subject.

**Sir JOSEPH COOK.**—How are you going to see that the pledge of the Government is carried out?

**Mr. RYAN.**—Honorable members are here as constant watch-dogs over public affairs; they can bring matters forward and move motions in this House. A majority of honorable members can always compel the Government to their will. If the House is not sitting, however, how can that be done? The Government do not require much time in which to decide and announce what they mean by their pledge. As for their decision to pay the increase as from the first day of this month, I hold that they should go much further back. The party to which I have the honour to belong has taken every opportunity to point that out. Before a motion of this character is agreed to, we should have some definite assurance that the pledge of the Government will be honoured. I am not satisfied that we have the assurance as yet; and, that being so, I shall vote against the motion.

**Mr. BELL** (Darwin) [11.51].—When the honorable member for Franklin (Mr. McWilliams) moved the adjournment of the debate on the basic wage last evening, protests were raised by honorable members opposite, and it was alleged that honorable members on this side did not wish to discuss the subject. I was one of those, however, who indicated that I was willing to remain and assist in its discussion. When there is important business before the House, and it appears obvious that honorable members are “stone-walling,” I am always prepared to vote for the application of the closure. Now that we have reached the

end of the session, however, if honorable members wish to carry on the debate upon the basic wage, I shall be willing to remain as long as other honorable members reasonably desire. It was intimated at the beginning of this week that the Government were prepared to fix a basic wage for public servants, but the Prime Minister did not reveal what the amount would be. I consider that a definite proposal of the Government should be before the House, and that, otherwise, it is of no use to debate the question at all. As there is no proposal before honorable members, the only way to intimate to the Government what we think is to debate the matter in this Chamber. It has been said on many occasions by honorable members opposite that supporters of the Government discuss subjects such as this in our party room upstairs, and that we arrive at our decisions beforehand. The Treasurer knows, and will confirm me, I am sure, when I say that nothing of the kind has occurred with respect to the basic wage. We have not had an opportunity to discuss it at a party meeting. If the House is given an opportunity to decide what is to be the basic wage, I shall press the view that this Chamber is not the proper tribunal for determining such a matter. But if the Government are about to arrive at and announce a decision, this House should have an opportunity to discuss that decision and indicate whether it thinks fit to approve it.

**Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN** (Eden-Monaro) [11.54].—It is an extraordinary procedure to endeavour to weight the basic wage question with an effort to put out the Government. If we were to take the business of the Government out of their hands there would be only one course for any self-respecting Ministry to adopt. It is the duty of the Government to present and control the business of this Chamber; it is their duty also to say at this stage what they are going to do regarding the basic wage.

**Mr. CONSIDINE.**—But they do not know.

**Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.**—Perhaps they do. Practically all honorable members have agreed that the lot of the public servant is an unhappy one, and that he is certainly underpaid. It is the duty of the Government to tell the House what they propose to do, otherwise there

will probably be a great deal of trouble throughout the country. Strikes have been threatened; telegrams have been sent to honorable members.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—Lying telegrams.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—It is very unwise to try to smother this business up. It cannot be smothered, and if an effort is made in that direction there will be serious results. I listened carefully to the utterance of the Prime Minister early this week, and I am quite as anxious as any one else to see public servants paid a living wage. I hope, however, that the matter will not be made a party one, for that procedure would inflict injury on the Public Service. I understood the Prime Minister to promise in this House that the Government would pay an interim basic wage, but that they wanted time to consider it. Why cannot the Treasurer tell honorable members now that the Government are prepared to pay a wage equivalent to the State basic wage?

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—Because Cabinet has had no time to consider it.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—We know that public servants must be paid a decent wage, and that they ought to receive it without delay.

Mr. SPEAKER.—Order! I ask the honorable member not to discuss the basic wage, since that is the subject-matter of the next matter on the business-paper.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—I shall not do so, sir, although I have been listening to other honorable members doing nothing else.

Mr. SPEAKER.—Order!

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—Very well; it is exceptional that I should not be permitted to discuss the subject while other honorable members may do so.

Mr. SPEAKER.—Order! The honorable member does not realize, I hope, that that is a serious reflection on the Chair. I have called other members to order for a reason similar to that which compelled my intervention in his case.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—I do not desire to go on discussing the matter; I merely point out that I am evidently unfortunate. It is the duty of the Government to say what they are prepared to do. If we were to sit here for a week we would get no further unless the Government adopted that course. There is a determined effort to make party capital out of the whole business.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—It is a party agitation.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—In the interests of public servants, with whom I have some sympathy, I plead with honorable members not to adopt that procedure. It would be better for the Government to hold a Cabinet meeting, even to-day, for, after all, the question must be settled, and the sooner the better. Delay will cause the dissatisfaction of the service to swell, and the agitation of its members to grow like a rolling snowball. Most honorable members on this side have made up their minds that the Government will be acting rightly in determining that some additional wage shall be paid to public servants, and I hope that Ministers will not hesitate to make a statement on the question. An honorable member asks me why I intend to vote for the motion.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I am not going to press it, and I ask leave to withdraw it.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

#### PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS.

Mr. JAMES PAGE.—I desire to make a personal explanation regarding an incident which occurred yesterday evening. I wish to apologize to the House for my conduct, and to unreservedly withdraw the remarks which I made, since I made them in anger.

Dr. MALONEY.—I desire also to make a brief personal explanation. I indorse what I said last night, and only wish to say, further, that my big-hearted friend has my love as much as he ever had it.

#### POSTMASTER-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT.

PORT ADELAIDE, EAST BALMAIN, AND ELIZABETH-STREET, MELBOURNE, POST OFFICES: RAILWAY POSTAL BAGS.

Mr. MAKIN.—Has the Postmaster-General received a reconsidered offer from the Chief Secretary of South Australia regarding the police station site at Port Adelaide upon which the citizens desire that their new post-office shall be erected?

Mr. WISE.—I have received no such offer.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM.—With regard to a substitute for travelling post-offices on the railway lines of New South Wales, I would like to know from the Postmaster-General what is being done in the direction of reaching finality upon the matter.

Mr. WISE.—The bag in use is being extended over all the main lines, and, so far, has been very successful.

Mr. MAHONY.—Has the Postmaster-General given further consideration to the very pressing necessity for a new post-office at East Balmain? The building at present in use is little better than a dog-box.

Mr. WISE.—The matter will be considered in connexion with the framing of next year's Estimates.

Dr. MALONEY.—Will the Postmaster-General take into consideration the necessity for completing the post-office building at the corner of Elizabeth and Bourke streets, and so providing accommodation for Commonwealth officers now housed in the thirty-four different buildings in and around the city now rented by the Commonwealth? I wish to have the unsightly galvanized iron building at the north end of the post-office removed.

Mr. WISE.—The honorable member put a similar question to me only two or three days ago. I then promised that I would give the matter consideration.

#### TUBERCULAR SOLDIERS.

Mr. HECTOR LAMOND.—In the absence of the Assistant Minister for Repatriation (Mr. Rodgers), I desire to ask the Treasurer if, during the recess, an effort will be made to ascertain the number of returned soldiers in the Commonwealth who are suffering from tuberculosis? I know that there are some difficulties in the way, but it is very necessary that we should have the exact figures.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I hope that when we adjourn for the Christmas vacation—I do not know when that will be—it will be possible to inquire into the matter.

#### BROKEN HILL-ADELAIDE TRUNK LINE TELEPHONE.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—In view of an implied promise made by his predecessor, will the Postmaster-General, during the Christmas vacation, take into consideration the desirability of connecting Broken Hill and Adelaide by means of a trunk line telephone?

Mr. WISE.—Yes.

#### ROYAL AUSTRALIAN ENGINEERS: PAY.

Mr. MAKIN.—I desire to ask the Assistant Minister for Defence—

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—We have had quite enough questions without notice to-day.

Mr. MAKIN.—Whether he will lay upon the table of the House this afternoon a report that has been submitted by a Committee appointed to investigate the claims made by the Royal Australian Engineers for increased pay, and which, I understand, recommends a 60 per cent. increase over the 1912 rates?

Sir GRANVILLE RYRIE.—I know nothing of such a report, and therefore cannot promise to lay it on the table.

#### TESTIMONIAL TO THE PRIME MINISTER.

Mr. LAVELLE.—Will the Treasurer state whether there is any truth in the rumour that he is to receive one-half of the amount of £25,000 presented by way of a testimonial to the Prime Minister?

Mr. SPEAKER (Hon. Sir Elliot Johnson).—Order! Such questions are quite out of order.

#### IRRIGATION: QUEENSLAND.

Mr. HIGGS asked the Prime Minister, upon notice—

Will the Government favorably consider the question of contributing money to Queensland and other States of the Commonwealth for irrigation purposes in the same proportion as that granted to New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia under the Murray Waters Agreement Act, provided that in Queensland the money so granted shall be expended in equal portions in Southern, Central, and Northern Queensland?

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I am unable, at the moment, to find the answer to this question, but if the honorable member has any propositions for enterprises similar to those which have been undertaken down here, and which promise the same result, I shall be disposed to look kindly on them. It is quite impossible, however, to give a definite answer to a hypothetical question. My sympathy is with irrigation. I think irrigation is a paying proposition for the Federal Government, as well as for any of the State Governments.

## SUGAR SUPPLIES: TASMANIA.

Mr. JACKSON asked the Minister for Trade and Customs, *upon notice*—

1. Is it a fact that sugar is being delivered to Hobart merchants at £49 per ton, whilst merchants at Launceston and other ports are compelled to pay £49 plus all charges?

2. If so, will the Minister immediately make sugar available to all other ports of Tasmania at £49, plus only the difference in freight, insurance, and wharfage as compared with the cost of delivery to Hobart?

Mr. GREENE.—The answers to the honorable member's questions are as follow:—

1. It has been so, the special rate regarding capital cities having recently been extended to Hobart.

2. Yes; this will include Launceston and all other ports in Tasmania to which sugar is shipped direct from either Sydney or Melbourne.

## WHEAT POOLS.

Mr. LAVELLE asked the Prime Minister, *upon notice*—

Whether he will inform the House when the final payments will be made in connexion with the 1915-16, 1916-17, 1917-18 Wheat "Pools," and also the amount to be paid?

Sir JOSEPH COOK (for Mr. HUGHES).—It is not possible to furnish the desired information at the present time.

## SOLDIER SETTLEMENT.

## FUNDS FOR PURCHASE OF ESTATES.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN asked the Treasurer, *upon notice*—

1. Is it a fact that in a number of cases in New South Wales where estates are required and offered for closer settlement for returned soldiers and for homes, the State Government has stated that no funds are available for these proposed purchases?

2. Is any money available for this purpose from the recent Peace Loan, which was stated to be for such repatriation purposes?

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—The answers to the honorable member's questions are as follow:—

1. The Government have no knowledge of any such statement.

2. Yes. The Commonwealth has agreed to lend to New South Wales the sum of £12,254,191 to settle 8,405 soldiers, and £1,000 for each soldier settled in excess of that number.

Up to the 30th June last the State had received £1,996,731. So much of the balance as falls due for payment during this financial year will be provided out of the Second Peace Loan. The amount already paid during this financial year is £2,187,888.

## AIR TRAFFIC REGULATION.

Mr. MARKS asked the Minister representing the Minister for Defence, *upon notice*—

Now that the Commonwealth has passed the necessary legislation for regulating air traffic, will the Government make an urgent request to the various State Governments to pass the necessary legislation to hand over the air control to the Commonwealth in terms of the arrangement entered into at the last Premiers' Conference.

Sir GRANVILLE RYRIE.—The answer is "Yes." I will supply the honorable member with a full reply at a later stage.

## JUNIOR MILITARY OFFICERS.

## REFUNDS OF INSURANCE PREMIUMS.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN asked the Minister representing the Minister for Defence, *upon notice*—

1. Is it a fact that some of the returned junior military officers who had their life insurance premiums paid by the Government during war service have been called upon to refund the amount of the premiums paid?

2. Is it the intention of the Government, having paid these premiums, to insist on a refund of the same?

Sir GRANVILLE RYRIE.—I shall supply the honorable member with an answer to his question either to-day or to-morrow.

## AUSTRALIAN ARMY PAY CORPS.

## BASIC WAGE: INCREMENTS.

Mr. RYAN asked the Minister representing the Minister for Defence, *upon notice*—

Will the members of the Australian Army Pay Corps be entitled to increments arising out of the fixing of a basic wage for Government employees?

Sir GRANVILLE RYRIE.—Owing to the fact that the Senate sat until an early hour this morning, and that the Minister for Defence was in attendance there, I am not able at present to supply an answer to the honorable member's question, but shall do so later on.

## PUBLIC SERVICE CLERICAL ASSOCIATION.

Mr. MAKIN asked the Prime Minister, *upon notice*—

1. Is it a fact that the representative of the Government in the Arbitration Court (Mr. Skewes) has stated his intention of applying

for an amendment of the proviso to clause 1 of the award of the Commonwealth Public Service Clerical Association for the purpose of depriving senior fifth class officers, certified to be efficient by the Public Service Commissioner, of the benefits granted by such proviso?

2. In view of the Prime Minister's statement of the 23rd November, 1920, to the effect that the Government had a solemn obligation to see that the Commonwealth employees had sufficient wages or salaries, and his admission that such was not the case at present, will the Prime Minister state whether or not he is in favour of the application being made?

3. In the event of the Prime Minister not being in favour of the proposed application being made by the Government's representative, will he issue instructions that the action be not taken?

4. Does the Prime Minister consider that the proposed application, if granted, would tend to promote contentment and loyalty in the Public Service?

Sir JOSEPH COOK (for Mr. HUGHES).—I shall have inquiry made into the matter.

#### POSTAL AND OTHER FACILITIES: HINDMARSH.

Mr. WISE.—On 24th November, 1920, the honorable member for Hindmarsh (Mr. Makin) asked me the following questions:—

1. Whether the Postmaster-General will have prepared a report concerning the postal, telephonic, telegraphic, money order, and bank facilities for Glanville, Birkenhead, Brompton, and Queenstown, in the Hindmarsh Division of South Australia?

2. What office convenience is afforded in these districts respectively?

What is the distance from the respective districts where the above-mentioned conveniences are afforded to the nearest post-office?

I promised the information would be obtained, and the following report has now been received from the Deputy Postmaster-General, Adelaide:—

1. In Glanville area there are two deliveries by postmen daily, three letter receivers, three public telephones, three licensed stamp vendors. In Birkenhead area there is an allowance post-office, in connexion with which public telephone facilities are provided, and a receiving agency of the Commonwealth Savings Bank established, also two deliveries by postmen daily, two letter receivers, and one public telephone in addition to one at the post-office. In Brompton area there are two deliveries by postmen daily, three letter receivers, one public telephone, one licensed stamp vendor. In Queenstown area there are two letter deliveries daily, three letter receivers, one public telephone, one licensed stamp vendor.

2. Glanville, *nil*; Birkenhead, an allowance office conducted in conjunction with a general store; Brompton, *nil*; Queenstown, *nil*.

3. Glanville, Port Adelaide official office, and Glanville Blocks allowance office, each approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile; and Semaphore official office approximately 1 mile distant from centre of area. At Birkenhead there is an allowance office; the nearest office where full facilities are provided is Port Adelaide, approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile from centre of area. Brompton—The Hindmarsh official office is approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile from centre of area. Queenstown—The Alberton official office is approximately 600 yards from centre of area.

#### WAR PRECAUTIONS ACT REPEAL BILL.

Mr. SPEAKER (Hon. Sir Elliot Johnson) reported the receipt of a message from the Senate, intimating that it had agreed to the Bill without amendment, but that—

The Senate records its protest against the inclusion in the Bill of provisions similar to those already included in a Bill passed by the Senate this session and transmitted for the concurrence of the House of Representatives, and declares that the matter is not to be regarded as a precedent.

#### INDUSTRIAL PEACE BILL (No. 2).

Bill returned from the Senate without amendment.

#### RIVER MURRAY WATERS BILL.

Bill returned from the Senate without amendment.

#### PAPERS.

The following papers were presented:—  
Defence Act and Naval Defence Act—  
Regulations, Statutory Rules 1920, Nos. 222, 223.

#### SHIPBUILDING CONTRACT. INQUIRY BY PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE.

Sir JOSEPH COOK (Parramatta—Treasurer) [12.10].—There is on the business-paper a very urgent notice of motion standing in the name of the honorable member for Dampier (Mr. Gregory), Chairman of the Public Works Committee, viz.:—

That the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works have leave to continue, during recess, its investigations into the matter of the shipbuilding contract of Messrs. Kidman and Mayoh referred to it on the 29th day of October, 1920, and to present an interim report thereon to the Governor-General.

I should like, with the indulgence of the House, to postpone the intervening Orders of the Day in order that that motion may be submitted.

Mr. MAHONY.—I object. You are not going on with that.

### BASIC WAGE COMMISSION'S REPORT.

Debate resumed from 25th November (*vide* page 7067), on motion by Mr. HUGHES—

That the papers be printed.

Upon which Mr. TUDOR had moved, by way of amendment—

That the following words be added:—“and in accordance with the definite pledge given by the Prime Minister in his policy speech at Bendigo on 30th October, 1919, the Government should give effect immediately to the finding of the Commission.”

Mr. McWILLIAMS (Franklin) [12.11].—I moved the adjournment of the debate last night, believing that it would be quite improper to discuss this all-important subject during an all-night sitting. This is the most important report that has yet been before this Parliament, since the findings of the Commission must undoubtedly affect the whole of the industrial life of Australia. It would be a grave mistake to assume that the Government could grant the basic wage to public servants without providing for its extension to every branch of industrialism in the Commonwealth. Some time ago a slightly embarrassing political situation arose, and the Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes), adopting his usual policy of following the line of least resistance, appointed a Royal Commission to inquire into the whole question of the basic wage. After an investigation, more or less complete, that Commission presented its report. Then followed a most extraordinary procedure, which, I agree with the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Tudor), is quite unprecedented, and I hope that it will never be repeated. The Commission, having sat for upwards of twelve months—having taken evidence in all the States—presented its report to the Governor-General, and it was received by the Prime Minister on Saturday or Sunday last. The right honorable gentleman promptly referred it back to the Chairman of the Commission for a further re-

port by him without consultation with the other members of the Commission. The procedure usually associated with the appointment of a Royal Commission is almost farcical. Whenever a difficulty arises—whenever any strain is cast upon Ministerial responsibility—a Royal Commission is appointed, and its report, on presentation to the Government, is generally referred to those whom it criticises, with a request that a statement in reply thereto shall be submitted. That is the invariable practice, with the result that we have submitted to us sheaves of reports, which make the whole inquiry ridiculous. But in the whole of my experience in State and Federal politics I have never heard of the Chairman of a Commission being asked, as in this case, to pronounce a verdict on the report of his own Commission, and doing so without consultation with his colleagues.

Mr. FENTON.—Especially after he had signed the report of the Commission and had so declared that he was favorable to the principle of the basic wage.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—If he had changed his mind after signing the report, he should have called his colleagues together and have told them what he was asked by the Prime Minister to do. The truth is that what has occurred is the result of one of the weak, silly, half-way measures which have marred the public life of the Prime Minister. Instead of facing with proper Ministerial responsibility the demand made by the Commonwealth Civil Service for increased pay, he referred the subject to a Commission providing for the consideration of a universal basic wage. This report, together with the semi-private memorandum of the chairman of the Commission, have thrown the commercial and industrial life of Australia into confusion, and will cause the gravest difficulties. Without consulting any one, so far as I know, the right honorable gentleman has announced that he will fix the basic wage for the Public Service at a minimum of about £4 4s. per week, commencing from the 1st November last. This is his statement as recorded in *Hansard* (page 6820)—

Now, if I am asked what the Government are prepared to do, I will state it in a few words. With the figures submitted for their consideration by the Basic Wage Commission, supported by the figures of Mr. Knibbs, showing

that the purchasing power of the sovereign has depreciated from 1907 until the present time to the extent that 84s. 8d. will now only buy what 43s. 1d. would buy in 1907, we have to satisfy ourselves that the public servant can buy as much with his present wage as he could buy in 1907. In many cases he cannot do so, because his money wage has not risen correspondingly to the increase in the cost of living. The Government recognises, therefore, that the wages of the public servants must be increased, and, although it is not prepared to say offhand what is a fair basic wage, it will give immediate consideration to the question.

My interpretation of those remarks is that the figures given by Mr. Knibbs are those which the Prime Minister had in his mind, and were, roughly, the foundation on which he intended to fix the basic wage. The Government of New South Wales have established a basic wage of, I think, £4 5s. per week. The Commonwealth Government have no right to do anything in this matter without consulting this Parliament. It is not within the province of a Minister, or of a Cabinet, to make a wholesale increase or a wholesale reduction in the payments to the public servants of the country without the consent of Parliament. We have surrendered more than enough of our control of the purse. This House should decide whether an increase in the salaries of the public servants should be made, and, if so, what it should be, and from what date it shall be paid. The speech delivered by the Prime Minister at Bendigo, following the ordinary procedure, was accepted by every candidate and the public generally as a statement of the policy of the Government. There is no reference in it to the limitation of the basic wage to any section of the community. As I read his remarks, he approved of a basic wage being fixed for the whole of Australia. If a basic wage is applied to the public servants of Australia, no man, no Government, and no party will be able to withstand the flood of requests which will sweep over the country demanding its application to all branches of work and to all classes of the community. Australians would not permit one particular class to enjoy a basic wage, a minimum living wage having no relation to the work they did, while the workers at large, in town and country, earned less. These would insist on having the basic wage conditions applied generally. Since the Basic Wage Commission's report was laid before honorable members, I have

given of my best in the attempt to grapple with the question with which it deals, but I am not prepared yet to say what would be the result of adopting the recommendations that it contains. Let me give some figures, which I succeeded in getting in the brief time at our disposal. According to the statistics, the average weekly earnings of miners, labourers, and other employees on the mines are—In New South Wales, 89s. 4d.; in Victoria, 86s. 8d.; in Queensland, 80s. 3d.; in Western Australia, 90s. 6d.; and in Tasmania, 77s. 2d.; the average for the Commonwealth being 89s. 10d. I have excluded the figures relating to coal miners, because most of what they produce is sold locally.

Mr. GABB.—And they are well organized.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—They are to be differentiated, not so much because of their organization, but for the reason that the bulk of the coal raised in Australia is used within the Commonwealth, so that it is possible for us to fix its selling price, also the wages and working conditions of the industry. There are in the Commonwealth 15,115 gold miners, 8,553 copper miners, 8,706 silver miners, and 5,256 tin miners, the total of these figures being 41,630 miners, exclusive of coal miners. In no case does the miner obtain the sum recommended by the Commission as the basic wage for a married man, the highest wage obtained being £4 14s., in Western Australia.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—How did you arrive at the earnings of the miners? On the basis of so much per week, or so much per ton?

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—I have excluded the coal miners.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—But nearly all the silver miners in Broken Hill are paid on tonnage rates.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—The strike settlement for Broken Hill fixed a rate of 15s. per day for miners, working on wages. My conclusion is that the application of the basic wage to mining would compel the great majority of the mines in Australia to close. Practically all the gold mines would close, or the miners would have to be put on to piece-work, like the coal miners, and some of the

silver miners. Most of the mines at Bendigo, Ballarat, Mount Lyell, and Cloncurry are just about paying expenses, with a not very large dividend occasionally. A number of them are not quite paying expenses, and a small call is paid by the shareholders from time to time in the hope, which makes mining possible, that they may "strike" something and get an adequate return from their investment.

Mr. STORY.—A vain hope!

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—But for that hope there would not be nearly so much mining as there is to-day. What will be the position in big mining centres like Bendigo or Ballarat if we insist on the application of a basic wage which the mines cannot pay? The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Tudor) yesterday, when dealing with secondary industries, was quite right in what he said. In relation to these we may make the Tariff whatever we choose, and by means of those friendly arrangements amongst manufacturers which practically banish competition, fix any wages or any price. But the moment we export outside Australia, Tariffs and price-fixing go to the four winds of heaven; we are then in competition with the world, and have to accept exactly what the production brings in the world's market. There is no "royal road;" if we fix a wage at which production cannot be made profitable, then production will cease. This morning I was for a few minutes at a conference, and heard from authentic sources that the best price obtainable by the producers for oats in Victoria to-day is from 1s. 6d. to 2s. per bushel.

Mr. JAMES PAGE.—Then why is the price of oatmeal still kept up?

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—The conference was considering the creation of a Pool for oats, and a producer deliberately said that this was the best price obtainable this season.

Mr. JAMES PAGE.—Then, it is a sad day for the farmer who grows oats!

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—The farmer cannot grow oats at that price.

Mr. JAMES PAGE.—He cannot.

Mr. FENTON.—The price is 2s. 9d. to 2s. 10d. to-day.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—That is the retail or city price. The position in regard to many other products is most serious. The honorable member for Grampians (Mr. Jowett) is in the midst of an important movement, having for its object the disposal of Australian crossbred wool, which to-day is unsaleable.

Mr. RILEY.—Because we are adopting the idiotic policy of not dealing with certain foreign countries!

Mr. JAMES PAGE.—That does not alter the fact that wool is unsaleable.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—I should not be doing my duty in the position I occupy in this House if I did not place before honorable members the true facts and conditions as I know them. This is a most serious blow to the most important industry of Australia. If our wool, or a large portion of it, is not wanted in the markets of the world, God knows what is going to happen to the growers! The honorable member for Grampians and others are trying to fix up some kind of Pool and so save the situation. Some growers have not had too good a time, and, in an involved position, with their wool unsaleable, are faced with hard ruin. What is the use of imposing a basic wage on such men? If the basic wage is made applicable to every wage-earner in Australia, as it must if we give it to the public servants, what about the small producers in the back-blocks, who have the largest families and are the most hard-working people in the community? They have gone into the back-blocks of every State to make homes for themselves, and in their struggle for a living have to work, not eight hours, but from daylight to dark, for less than half the suggested basic wage. Are these people to have no consideration? Is consideration to be given only to those who are non-producers, directly?

Mr. CONSIDINE.—What?

Mr. GABB.—Nobody has said that.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—I deliberately say "non-producers, directly," because however desirable it may be to encourage secondary industries, it is the primary industries which keep the rate of exchange down—the export of the surplus wheat, wool, meat, coal, fruit, and hides—and it is that alone which keeps the

wheels of the Commonwealth going. We must not make the cross now being carried by primary producers too heavy to bear. I warn the Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes), the Leader of the Labour party (Mr. Tudor), and members generally that if we do anything to injure our primary industries, the secondary industries and the whole fabric of our industrial life will tumble about our ears like the walls of Jericho in ruin and consequential chaos. We may go on tinkering with Wages Boards and awards, we may do whatever we choose, but unless the primary producers of Australia—the only men who, with their export trade, produce the money to pay the interest on the indebtedness of the country—receive a share of our consideration, all the "quack" medicines we may administer will not cure the consequent evils. Holding the views I do, I say that not one penny piece in the way of a basic wage should be expended without the approval of this House. We have no right to go into recess and leave an open cheque with a Government to fix industrial remuneration in any direction.

Mr. STEWART.—Particularly the present Government.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—I mention no particular Government. This House has resigned the power of the purse ever since the war broke out, and permitted expenditure and interference with our industrial life by Cabinet rule and Regulation to a degree I never thought possible in a British community. It is time we cried "Halt!" and I, for one, mean to cry "Halt!" Honorable members seem to think that, because I moved the adjournment of the debate last night, I am not in favour of discussing the question to a conclusion. But, knowing the feeling of Australia, and knowing the force behind the agitation by means of which members have been "bombardeed" for some weeks, I say that nothing could be more dangerous than for this House to attempt to shirk this question, and go into recess without dealing with it. I say deliberately and seriously that I am not prepared to leave to any Cabinet a matter such as this, which is the first responsibility, the primal duty, of the House itself.

Mr. MAXWELL.—Time is given us to discuss the matter. What do you propose?

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—I propose that we should sit to a reasonable hour this evening, and meet to-morrow morning until 1 o'clock. Then, I propose, if necessary to complete the discussion, we should meet on Monday, and sit to a finish. I have on previous occasions referred to the enormous increase in the cost of government in this country since the inception of Federation, apart altogether from war expenditure.

Mr. CHARLTON.—I think the war led us into our present position.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—The enormous burden placed on the people of Australia by the war must necessarily have its effect. When we deliberately went into that war, we realized that, while men were prepared to risk their lives, we should be prepared to take some financial risk.

Mr. CHARLTON.—That is why people here should take some risk to meet our present financial troubles.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—I agree with the honorable member. Before the last election, when sitting behind the Government, I urged that the drift in the finances should be stopped. Last night the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Tudor) confined himself to the manufacturing or secondary industries, and the figures for 1918, the latest available, show that these represent £58,000,000 worth of production, with which we have power to deal. But the great pastoral industries represent £98,300,000 worth of production, 94 per cent. of which has to be exported out of Australia. We have no more command over the price of wool than we have over the tides of Bass Strait.

Mr. MAXWELL.—What about the Basic Wage Commission's report?

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—The honorable member is one of those who do not like to hear the truth.

Mr. MAXWELL.—What ought we to do about the report of the Commission?

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—I am trying to show what the position of Australia is, and its ability to face a universal

basic wage. It is worse than useless to attempt to fool either the public servants or the workers by giving them an undertaking which we know we cannot carry out. Since I received the report of the Basic Wage Commission, I have done my very best to measure its effects. Any private individual, before he increases his expenditure, ascertains whether his revenue is sufficient to meet it. In 1918 the production value of the leading industries of Australia was as follows:—

	£
Pastoral	98,300,000
Agriculture	58,000,000
Dairying	33,738,000
Timber	7,000,000
Mining	26,156,000
Total	223,194,000

Of course, as coal is mostly consumed in Australia, we can fix whatever price we like for it, but it is hopeless to endeavour to fix the selling price of any produce which Australia has to export and sell on the world's market at the world's prices. It is true that during the last four years of the war values were abnormally enhanced, but they are already coming back rapidly to something like the original figures. The value of our mineral production, excluding coal, for the decade reads as follows:—

Gold fell from £11,557,650 in 1910 to £4,537,000 in 1919.

Silver and lead from £2,389,412 in 1910 and £6,104,977 in 1918 to about £1,976,000 in 1918.

Copper from £2,389,412 in 1910 and £4,464,787 in 1918 to £1,825,793 in 1919.

Tin from £1,209,973 in 1911 and £1,432,294 in 1918 to £1,020,414 in 1919.

Moreover, in every other direction, excluding agriculture, there has been an enormous reduction in the quantity of the production of every commodity which helps to make Australia prosperous, except in regard to secondary industries. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Tudor), who takes a great deal of interest in these matters, gave us some figures last night showing that in the past few years the secondary industries of Australia have made great progress, but he also pointed out that boot factories in Melbourne were shutting down because of

over-production. This brings me to a consideration of the question of profiteering. We know that calfskins, which rose to the absurdly high price of 5s. per lb., are to-day not worth much more than 5d. per lb., yet, despite this enormous drop in the value of the hide, there has been no drop in the price of leather or boots. Heavier hides have also fallen in value. We all remember the plea that was put forward on behalf of the "poor" manufacturers, who, according to the Leader of the Opposition, are doing exceedingly well despite the hard times. The honorable gentleman has alluded to the enormous profits they have been making, but last year, when some of us spoke in the same way, the cry was raised by honorable members opposite, and some honorable members on the Ministerial side, that the price of hides had sent up the price of leather. And the argument put up a few months ago before the Victorian Prices Commission by the tanners and boot manufacturers was that they had been compelled to increase the price of their leather and boots because of the enormous increase which had taken place in the price of hides. Hides have since come down with a slump, but the price of leather and boots still remains where it was. In my opinion, the Prices Commission referred to is nothing but a farce. I was told the other day by a man in the clothing trade—he is one of the most intelligent workers I have had the pleasure of meeting—that, as a result of the inquiry by that Commission into clothing, his firm was able to increase the price of its suits of clothes by £2 or £2 2s.

I think I have shown that we are in an extremely parlous condition in regard to Australia's production. It is only the enhanced value of our products that has brought about the increase shown in our production values, whereas, as a matter of fact, our production of wool, wheat, gold, and base metals have been on the down grade for some time past. I have mentioned the price of oats. Hay is almost unsaleable, but, although the farmers have enjoyed good prices for their wheat during the past few years, no one will say for one moment that the price of wheat for the present season will remain at the present high figure. In fact my information goes to show that there is no reason whatever to expect that the present price will be maintained on

the world's markets. With all these facts in front of us we are expected to rush into a proposal which will revolutionize the whole of the industrial and producing life of Australia; and at the fag-end of an extremely strenuous session, without giving proper consideration to the most important report that has ever been sent into this House, arrive at what should be a basic wage to apply throughout the Commonwealth.

Mr. MATHEWS.—If the honorable member has made up his mind to vote against the proposal we might as well come to a decision in two minutes instead of waiting two days to do so.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—In this matter we are like—

An infant crying in the night, an infant crying for the light, and with no language but a cry.

No one in this House can say what effect the application of the basic wage will have on the progress of the industries of Australia.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—Yet the honorable member insists that the House must continue sitting until a decision is arrived at.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—I do not. Honorable members are labouring under a great delusion if they imagine that a great subject like this can be dealt with and finally decided in three or four days.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I would very much like to know the honorable member's attitude.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—In the first place I think this matter originated in an electioneering squib. The Prime Minister rushed into the matter with his head down in promising to pay the civil servants a basic wage, and the Leader of the Opposition is plunging into it, not only with his head down, but also with his eyes shut, in proposing that the wage recommended by the Basic Wage Commission should be applied indiscriminately all over Australia. This matter will need the fullest and most complete consideration.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—Good old consideration! Another Commission.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—No. I say that it should not be referred to a Commission, but that the Government must take the matter in hand and deal with it, accepting full and complete responsibility for what it does.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—At the beginning of the honorable member's speech he insisted that the matter must be fixed by Parliament.

Mr. MAXWELL.—Yes, and not by the Government.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—It is astonishing what a lack of intelligence some honorable members display when they will not listen to what one is trying to put forward. I have said nothing of the kind. I said that the Ministry had no right to fix and pay a basic wage; but that they should fix what they think is a proper wage, and bring it down to Parliament in the form of Supplementary Estimates, whereupon this House should give a decision upon the matter. If honorable members cannot distinguish between these two courses it is not my fault; my language is sufficiently plain and straightforward. This House must have the final say in the matter.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—When does the honorable member suggest that the Government should do this? Before we rise?

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—No. It would be madness to attempt to do so.

Mr. MATHEWS.—Is the honorable member willing to vote for paying £100 to each public servant until the House meets again?

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—I am willing to say to the Government in the kindest possible way, "Take this matter and deal with the question in a fair, proper, generous and just way, but immediately you have come to your decision call Parliament together." We have no right to go into a long recess with an important matter like this over our heads. No honorable member attends to his duties more closely than I do; and I have not seen my home more than once since Easter. To me the session has been specially strenuous, but I contend that we have no right to go into a long recess. We have no right either to allow the Government to fix up this matter without the consent of Parliament or to allow the question to be dragged out until May or June next. I suggest to the Government that they should consider it fairly, and then call Parliament together, and put their proposal deliberately before us. In the

meantime they should give no increase established on a basic wage.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I should like to hear the views of the honorable member in regard to giving an interim increase.

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—The Government must take full responsibility in that regard, and face the House with a definite proposal.

*Sitting suspended from 1 to 2.15 p.m.*

Question—that the words proposed to be added be so added (Mr. TUDOR's amendment)—put. The House divided.

Ayes .. ..	18
Noes .. ..	36
Majority .. ..	18

**AYES.**

Brennan, F.	McGrath, D. C.
Catts, J. H.	Moloney, Parker
Charlton, M.	Riley, E.
Fenton, J. E.	Ryan, T. J.
Gabb, J. M.	Tudor, F. G.
Lavelle, T. J.	West, J. E.
Mahon, W. G.	
Makin, N. J. O.	
Mathews, J.	
McDonald, C.	

*Tellers:*

Cunningham, L. L.
Watkins, D.

**NOES.**

Atkinson, L.	Jowett, E.
Bell, G. J.	Lamond, Hector
Blundell, R. P.	Lister, J. H.
Bowden, E. K.	Mackay, G. H.
Bruce, S. M.	Marks, W. M.
Cameron, D. C.	Marr, C. W. C.
Chanter, J. M.	Maxwell, G. A.
Chapman, Austin	Page, Dr. Earle
Cook, Sir Joseph	Poynton, A.
Corser, E. B. C.	Prowse, J. H.
Fleming, W. M.	Rodgers, A. S.
Foster, Richard	Ryrie, Sir Granville
Fowler, J. M.	Smith, Laird
Francis, F. H.	Stewart, P. G.
Greene, W. M.	Wise, G. H.
Groom, L. E.	
Higgs, W. G.	
Hughes, W. M.	
Jackson, D. S.	

*Tellers:*

Burchell, R. J.
Story, W. H.

**PAIRS.**

Maloney, Dr.	Best, Sir Robert
Blakeley, A.	Hay, A.
Conidine, M. P.	Bamford, F. W.
Lazzarini, H. P.	Bayley, J. G.
Nicholls, S. R.	Livingston, J.
Page, James.	Gibson, W. G.
Anstey, Frank	Watt, W. A.

Question so resolved in the negative.

Amendment negatived.

Sir JOSEPH COOK (Parramatta—Treasurer) [2.23].—I have a further amendment, which I move, as follows:—

That the following words be added to the motion:—

and this House approves the statement made by the Prime Minister, on Tuesday, 23rd November, regarding the basic wage to be paid to employees in the Commonwealth Public Service, and requests the Government forthwith to arrange for such amount to be paid as will be equitable and just alike to employees and the general public, and within the practical capabilities of the Commonwealth to defray—Payment of such basic wage to be made as from 1st November, 1920.

The honorable member for Yarra (Mr. Tudor) submitted a proposal of a concrete kind. I now submit another, and I ask honorable members to agree to my amendment, so that there shall be no mistake concerning the action which the Government are to take immediately in connexion with this very important matter.

Mr. PARKER MOLONEY.—Why are you breaking your election pledge?

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—There is no such election pledge.

Mr. TUDOR.—“The Government will at the earliest possible date give effect to these principles.” Those are the Prime Minister's words.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—We are giving effect to “these principles” at the earliest possible moment.

Mr. J. H. CATTS.—On a point of order, I submit that the amendment should be stated to the House, and that the Prime Minister should not be seated at the table altering the amendment, which has been already moved by the Treasurer.

Mr. SPEAKER (Hon. Sir Elliot Johnson).—The Minister is in order in moving and speaking to his amendment. I have not yet received a copy of that amendment.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I have not yet had time to read the report of the Basic Wage Commission. No member of this House has had time, and, therefore, I am moving my amendment to give some relief to the public servants of the country, who, I believe, are not too well paid at the present moment.

*Honorable members interjecting,*

Mr. SPEAKER.—Order! I do not propose to make my throat sore in my

efforts to maintain order. I give honorable members fair warning that unless they preserve a reasonable degree of silence, so that the Minister may be able to address the Chair, I shall be compelled to ask the House to take the necessary steps to give effect to the Standing Orders regarding members guilty of disorderly conduct.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—So far as I know anything of the report, it seems to me a peculiarly incomplete one. I should have thought that an inquiry of the kind would have made some reference to the number of basic wages already established up and down Australia by various bodies of various kinds and have tried to reconcile them for us. There is to-day in New South Wales a basic wage which has been declared by a Board of Trade, after an elaborate inquiry. There is a basic wage which has been declared quite recently, I understand, in Western Australia, after a similar inquiry. There has been a basic wage declared in Victoria in connexion, at any rate, with some classes of employees.

Mr. TUDOR.—There is no basic wage in this State, and no Victorian will say there is.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—Then I shall say that a rate of wage has been declared by the Government, at least, so far as the railway service is concerned. It does not matter very much whether we call it a basic wage or any other kind of a wage; it is the recognised standard wage. And these various declarations are the standards for the various States. One would have thought that a Commission such as we set up would take these bases of wage payments in the different States, and that it would have made some pronouncement concerning them. Honorable members know that we cannot take the basic wages applying in various States, and reconcile them without further inquiry. We are driven back, therefore, to see how our own public servants are faring as they stand related to the various determinations of the States. That is our immediate obligation, and the Government are preparing to meet that obligation at the earliest possible moment. One thing stands out from all these inquiries, that is, that the rate of payment for our public servants is not an adequate rate, having regard to

the decreased spending power of the sovereign and to conditions as they exist to-day in the Public Service. It is that concrete practical difficulty that the Government are immediately responsible for. It is that concrete practical difficulty which we propose to solve; and I know of no better way in which to solve it than, after having given the most careful consideration to the whole matter, to fix, at the earliest possible moment, irrespective of all the differing State rates, a rate for our own servants such as will do them substantial justice.

Mr. FENTON.—What does the Treasurer now propose as a basic wage for public servants?

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—Is the honorable member prepared off-hand with a solution of all these problems?

Mr. FENTON.—The Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes) gave us a very strong indication the other day of what the Government proposed.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I am not prepared to say at the moment.

Mr. FENTON.—He spoke of £4 4s. 8d.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—The honorable member is quite wrong; £4 4s. 8*3*d., was it not? I do not pretend to be one of those clever gentlemen who can deal off-hand with the most intricate problems. I simply say that the Government is under an obligation to lose no time in arriving at this determination. It ought not to take us very long. It should be possible for us to deal with it, say, during the next fortnight. The matter, however, cannot be dealt with in this House. It can be dealt with only after the most quiet and careful consideration elsewhere. I therefore invite the House to agree to this further amendment which I submit on behalf of the Government. It means substantial justice at the earliest possible moment to public servants; it proposes as soon as possible to do the fair thing by them.

Honorable members may speak of this difficulty and that with regard to the cost of living. But every one admits that the times are out of joint, and that it is difficult in these days for the working people of the continent to live. No one knows that better than do the people who, although outside the ranks of those who labour with their hands, are yet not blessed with too much of this world's goods. Every one admits

that conditions will not right themselves, either, for some time to come. The condition of things is abnormal. It seems to me that whatever we may do can be of only a temporary and tentative character. These matters must ultimately adjust themselves as the business conditions, the exchanges, and the production and trade and commerce of the world adjust themselves. In that way only shall we have the final adjustment. It will be brought about, not by your Courts, not by your Royal Commissions, but by the ordinary processes of production and trade throughout the Commonwealth.

We are treating, therefore, a temporary, and, let us hope, passing phase of economics in this country—a phase which none the less presses with particular severity on the working people. It is in pursuance of our obligation under these temporary, shifting, and, let us hope, evanescent conditions, that we now make this proposal. It aims, first of all, at having regard to the wants and needs of the public servants of Australia. It aims, at the same time, at paying some due regard to the financial capabilities of the country to meet this kind of obligation. It is all very well to say that a man can live comfortably and decently and under reasonable conditions only by the payment of a wage which has been demonstrated to be an uneconomic one.

Mr. MAKIN.—The Government can find the money with which to pay interest to the money-lenders.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—Does the honorable member suggest that we should repudiate our obligations to the money-lenders?

Mr. MAKIN.—No.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—It is a strange doctrine to have laid down in this the National Parliament, that we should ignore our obligations to those who lend us money.

Mr. MAKIN.—I have made no such suggestion.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—Then there is no relevancy in the honorable member's interjection.

It has been well established by the inquiries of this Royal Commission, as well as by independent inquiries conducted by Mr. Knibbs, that the basic wage suggested as necessary to provide a man with the comforts and decencies that he should

have in a civilized community would, under present conditions, bankrupt the country. That is the first fundamental fact that we have to keep in mind. Mr. Knibbs says it cannot be done. He is an independent authority. Surely he has no axe to grind.

Mr. J. H. CATTS.—He has not made such a statement.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—Mr. Knibbs says that if the incomes of all persons in Australia receiving more than £156 per year were divided to-day amongst those whose income is less than that amount, it would give them an average of only 10s. per week. In effect, Mr. Knibbs says that these basic wage proposals are in their very essence uneconomic. They cannot be paid out of the ordinary incomes of the country. That is the first fundamental fact we should keep in mind.

Mr. GABB.—I think that is mere figure juggling.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I am quoting statements made by Mr. Knibbs. The honorable member may speak of them as "figure juggling," or describe them in any way he pleases; but these are the figures by which we have to be guided, and they make it quite clear that the country to-day could not provide—

Mr. TUDOR.—While the employers are piling up their profits.

Mr. SPEAKER.—Order! I ask honorable members to exercise some restraint over their feelings.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I repeat that Mr. Knibbs says that the basic wage as suggested by the Commission as reasonable and proper cannot be paid, because we have not the money here with which to pay it. That is not my statement. It is a statement by the Commonwealth Statistician, and, moreover, it is buttressed by the statement made by Mr. Piddington after due and full inquiry into the economic factors of the situation.

Mr. TUDOR.—After three hours' consideration.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—After twelve months' inquiry on the part of the Commission.

Mr. TUDOR.—Mr. Piddington had only three hours in which to prepare his memorandum. In the report of the Commission, which was signed by him after inquiry extending over twelve months,

the basic wage in the case of this State is given as £5 16s. per week.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—Has the honorable member ever heard of the artist who, when asked how long he had taken to paint a certain picture, replied "Twenty years"? It has taken Mr. Piddington twelve months to acquire the knowledge that he has compressed into his memorandum, the compilation of which occupied him for only a few hours.

I shall not debate this matter further, although it is a most interesting one. In dealing with it the Government must be guided by what the resources of the country are in relation to the question, and by the necessities of its public servants. This further amendment meets both those factors, and I submit it to the House in the belief that it will bring a much-needed and welcome addition to the incomes of the public servants of this country while at the same time leaving the country free to discharge its proper obligations.

Mr. HUGHES.—I desire to make a personal explanation. In this morning's issue of the *Argus*, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Tudor) is reported to have said in the course of his speech in the House last night—

He had just received a telegram from Sydney as follows:—"Prime Minister has definitely promised, if twenty-four members agree, Parliament will not adjourn before decision re basic wage for Federal employees. Major Marr will make one. Will you make another?"

The honorable member used those words last night.

Mr. TUDOR.—I quoted the telegram.

Mr. HUGHES.—I desire to say that the thing is a falsehood.

Mr. TUDOR.—The Prime Minister does not deny that I received the telegram?

Mr. HUGHES.—No; but I say the thing is a falsehood, a forgery, a lie! I ask the honorable member the name of the person who signed that telegram.

Mr. TUDOR.—"O'Connor." I thought I mentioned it.

Mr. HUGHES.—I thought it came from him.

Mr. MAHONY.—Every honorable member received a similar telegram.

Mr. HUGHES.—Well, I say that it is a lie; it is a forgery. Such tactics are typical of those who profess to represent

the public servants, but who do not represent them. They represent only that particular section which is at the bottom of all this trouble.

Mr. TUDOR (Yarra) [2.41].—I received the telegram to which the Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes) has just referred, and in quoting it last night thought I gave the name of the individual who signed it.

Mr. BELL.—We all got a similar telegram.

Mr. TUDOR.—I am not so fortunate as some honorable members are in gaining publicity through the newspapers. I desire now to deal with the further amendment which has just been submitted by the Treasurer (Sir Joseph Cook). From the very inception of the Commonwealth Parliament we have had no such experience as this. I cannot recall any case where the Deputy Leader of the Government in this House has moved an amendment on a motion submitted by the Prime Minister. Such a thing has never happened before. The veriest tyro in politics must know what has led to the submission of this further amendment. We all know what has happened upstairs. The Ministerial party has met, and has said, "The amendment moved by the Leader of the Labour party is loaded. We shall need to make a further proposal in order to counteract its effects."

Mr. HUGHES.—Call that loaded? It is only a squib. It has not gone off.

Mr. TUDOR.—Of course it is only a squib. That is why the Prime Minister's party has prepared a further amendment to counteract it.

Mr. HUGHES.—I shall go out for a walk.

Mr. TUDOR.—I have not the slightest objection. I repeat that the Government and their supporters discovered that they dare not vote without explanation or qualification against the amendment that I had submitted on behalf of the Labour party, in which I called upon the Government to stand up to the definite pledge made on their behalf by the Prime Minister to the people of Australia. This further amendment is, therefore, submitted as a way out for them. I would remind the House, however, that in the letters patent appointing the Commission there is no reference to public servants, nor is there any reference what-

ever in this report to a basic wage for public servants as such. The whole report refers to the community as a whole, but I congratulate the public servants of the Commonwealth on the success of their agitation. Three weeks ago nothing was heard of them in this connexion, and nothing would have been heard of them—

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—That is not correct.

Mr. TUDOR.—It is absolutely correct. Nothing would have been heard of their claim but for the shoal of telegrams on the subject which have recently been received by honorable members from representatives of the Service.

Mr. ATKINSON.—That is not correct.

Mr. TUDOR.—It is absolutely correct. No honorable member opposite can point to any utterance from that side of the House in favour of doing anything for the public servants. When the Arbitration (Public Service) Bill was under discussion—it is said that the Minister for Works and Railways (Mr. Groom) is to be made Arbitrator under the Bill—was in Committee, the honorable member for Ballarat (Mr. McGrath) moved to insert a provision requiring the payment to the public servants of not less than the basic wage recommended by the Commission, but members opposite voted against that amendment, and nothing was then said about doing justice to the public servants.

I congratulate the Service on the agitation which has been carried out. It is nothing to me that it has been conducted by a Mr. O'Connor. It would have been all the same had it been conducted by a Mr. Smith, a Mr. MacIntosh, or a Mr. Jones, to give representative English, Scottish, and Welsh names as well as an Irish name. Good work has been performed in compelling the Government to say that they will do justice to the public servants.

The Treasurer told us in one breath that he had not read the Commission's report, and, in the next, that it did not set forth the basic wage provisions of the States. He said that in New South Wales the Board of Trade, after an exhaustive inquiry, had fixed the basic wage at £4 5s. per week; but was that inquiry as exhaustive as the Commission's inquiry? Will any one say that the amount recommended is outrageously high, or more than any one should receive? The right

honorable gentleman wished to make out that the report of the Commission is absolutely valueless.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—I did not do any such thing.

Mr. TUDOR.—The report is the result of twelve months' work. Both parties were represented. I was careful last night to say that I did not reflect on Mr. Piddington in any way; but I said then, as I say now, that it was not fair for the Prime Minister to ask him at 5 o'clock in the afternoon to reply as soon as possible to certain questions. Mr. Piddington told the Prime Minister that he would let him have a reply to his questions at 9 o'clock. He was careful to point out that under the Commission those questions could not be dealt with, and the Government, had they wished to have them dealt with, should have altered the Commission to enlarge the scope of the inquiry. The Treasurer has told us that he relies on the figures of the Government Statistician. Last night I referred to Mr. Piddington having omitted to take count of about 580,000 children.

Sir GRANVILLE RYRIE.—The honorable member was in error in what he said last night, because the Government Statistician's figures which he quoted referred to all the children in Australia, whereas Mr. Piddington's figures referred only to the children of the wage-earners of Australia.

Mr. TUDOR.—I had the Statistician's authority for saying that the number of children in Australia under the age of fourteen years is 1,580,000. Now, 80 per cent. of the children in the community are children of the working class, that is, four out of every five are wage-earners' children.

I congratulate the public servants on the success of their agitation. I am desirous, too, that the unions which have been appealing to the Arbitration Court, and were promised by the Prime Minister redress of their grievances, should be given a living wage. The Treasurer told us that the Commission does not refer to the basic-wage rates of the States, but on pages 15 and 16 of this report there are eleven distinct references to the decisions of Judges and others. They do not give the figures.

The Government is anxious to get out of a hole. Ministers thought that the

debate on the amendment would continue, but we were right in taking a vote on it. The record of that division is what will stand. The Government ought to have kept the pledge which it made when it went before the people last year.

**Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN** (Eden-Monaro) [2.48].—We should give more time and consideration to this question than has been given to it. It is a mistake to make a party matter of it. The result of doing so was shown by the recent division. Can any one say that the record of that division is an indication of the personal opinions of members on this subject?

**OPPOSITION MEMBERS.**—Yes.

**Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.**—I deny that. The assumption is against common sense. When a députation of public servants waited on a number of members in Sydney the other day—

**HONORABLE MEMBERS.**—Hear, hear!

**Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.**—This mob way of trying to shout me down will not assist the public servants, but it may have the effect of prejudicing opinion against them. I intend to express my views. We have been told by the Treasurer that figures have been supplied by the Government Statistician which show that it would mean bankruptcy to the country to apply the recommended basic wage to the public servants. Many of our public servants, no doubt, are underpaid and overworked, but the public servants, as a whole, must realize that the Service is too big for the country.

**Mr. GABB.**—You are supporting a Government which is overworking and underpaying the Public Service.

**Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.**—I do not know, Mr. Speaker, whether you will deal with the honorable member, or whether I shall. If you do not, I shall try my hand on him with my blackthorn.

**Mr. SPEAKER.**—The honorable member must not interrupt.

**Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.**—A great deal has to be taken into consideration before deciding this matter. Our Public Service is too big and too expensive. As most persons are aware, there are hundreds in the Service who could be dispensed with; and if the public servants were wise, they would attempt to drive out the drones, because the community has too

big a burden to carry. Of what use would it be to apply a basic wage which would make the country bankrupt? Would it not be fairer and more honest to support the Prime Minister in his promise—and see that he kept to it—to deal properly with the Public Service. The Treasurer has said that Ministers will make up their minds within a fortnight. Ministers must take responsibility for whatever is done, and will be answerable to Parliament, which can send them about their business if it disapproves of their actions. I presume that a wage similar to the basic wage of the States will be adopted. I and others would support the payment to the public servants of a basic wage like that in force in New South Wales, which, I think, they would be ready to accept. The Prime Minister has promised that the Government will look into the matter, and that an increased wage will be paid to the public servants as from the 1st November. I think that the public servants, if they could express their opinion, would be satisfied with that. Of what use would it be for them to demand a wage which the country cannot pay? Are we to ignore our pension obligations, and the other claims upon the Treasury, in order to pay the rate which the Commission recommends? We must take a common-sense view of this matter. I know that many of the public servants are getting less than a living wage, and I say that the Government must give them a living wage, and must subsequently get its action ratified by Parliament. At the same time, I advise the public servants to get rid of a lot of the loafers in the Service, because there is a limit to what the country can pay.

I do not blame those who have conducted this agitation. After all, we had an agitation among ourselves when we found that we were underpaid. Those who were not receiving a living wage are right in agitating for more; but the demand can be overdone. The attempt is being made to create political capital out of this matter, and I refuse to allow gentlemen opposite to put, unanswered, into  *Hansard* statements branding me and others with having less sympathy for the public servants than they have. Certainly, I am not prepared, as an electioneering dodge, to talk clap-trap and to advocate the payment of rates which it

has been shown by official figures would bankrupt the country. The Government have undertaken to fix before Christmas a fair basic wage for the public servants. The Prime Minister has pointed out that the cost of living has, within a certain period, almost doubled, and that, therefore, the living wage must be doubled in that time. He proposes to take the proper course. If an attempt is made to create political capital out of this question, nothing will be gained, because it would require a strong cause to put out the Government.

I wish to make my position quite clear. I realize that quite a number of our public servants are not getting a fair living wage, and I hold the Government to their promise that within fourteen days from now they will make up their minds what is a fair basic wage. When Parliament again meets, the determination of the Government will be submitted to us, and if we think that the wage is not sufficient we can, of course, by a majority, decide to increase it. But if I think the wage fixed by the Government is sufficient, I shall not be led away to vote for one of £5 16s., when we are informed by the Statist and by the Treasurer that we cannot afford to pay it. What is the good of promising what we cannot perform?

Mr. LAVELLE.—It is a libel on Australia to say that we cannot afford to pay it.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—I do not say that Australia cannot afford to pay it; but I am prepared to follow the Statist and the Treasurer, the latter of whom, in strong and clear language, told us that to act on the amendment of the Leader of the Opposition would mean bankruptcy to the country. I advise the public servants to keep on their agitation, and see that they get a fair deal, but they will be ill-advised to allow politicians to make political capital out of them. After all, it is a pretty daring position to take up—that all the men who are prepared to give fair play are on the Opposition side of the House. The fact that a man holds what have been termed conservative views does not prove that he is not a fair-minded man; indeed, some of the most conservative of men are always prepared to pay a reasonable wage. Personally, I consider that the basic wage paid in New South Wales, which I believe is about

£4 5s. per week, would be a fair one to adopt for the Commonwealth Public Service. But whatever sum may be suggested, I am not prepared to put my judgment against that of the Statist and the Treasurer. Of course, in places where living is expensive an extra allowance might be given on that account, a policy already adopted in the Public Service. I am not in favour of differentiation, but it is only fair that an allowance of that kind should be made. There should also be some special consideration for those who live in localities where it is difficult to obtain the necessities of life, and also for those with large families. Unless we use common sense we shall find ourselves on the edge of the precipice; and we ought to go slow. I can quite understand that those who cannot get bread and butter feel very much aggrieved, but it must not be forgotten that the Public Service is overloaded with thousands who are not required.

Mr. MCGRATH.—Where are they—in the Defence Department?

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—Most of them are in the big cities. In the country, on the other hand, we find the public servants overworked and underpaid, sometimes one man doing two men's work. In the cities, as I say, we find hives of men and women who could be dispensed with.

Mr. MAKIN.—That is the fault of the Government.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—But the Government cannot meet the expenditure that would be necessary under such an amendment as that proposed by the Leader of the Opposition. I voted against that amendment, because I think it would put us in the position of not being able to meet the demand made on the finances. We have also to remember that provision has to be made for pensions for the invalided and aged, and for the soldiers; and I do not see how we could meet any further expenditure, considering that we are up to the limit of taxation.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—Mr. Piddington says that if we did pay the basic wage of £5 16s. the public servants would, in four quarters, be no better off than they are now.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—We know that with increased wages the cost of living is increased.

Mr. GABB.—Then we had better decrease the present wages by £1, and make the people better off!

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—That may be the honorable member's reasoning, but it is not mine. My position is that the country is rich enough to pay a decent living wage.

Mr. GABB.—That is what we voted for on the Commission's recommendation.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—It is what the Government have promised within fourteen days, and when the question comes before us next year it should not be decided by any party vote to get political advantage. I am not pleading for the support of the public servants, for whom I have a great respect, and many of whom are my personal friends. I am surprised that honorable members opposite should think that the public servants are such asses as to believe what they say.

Mr. MAKIN.—You should have been at the Exhibition meeting last night.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—I dare say I ought, but I take it that my place is within this chamber when I am able to attend. It is extraordinary what was said at that meeting last night in reference to the honorable member for Parkes (Mr. Marr), who is, as we know, one of the strongest "battlers" here in the interests of the public servants.

Mr. GABB.—What about his vote today?

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—The honorable member's judgment is no good. The honorable member for Parkes was denounced last night at the meeting because he was away on public duty in his own electorate.

Mr. MAKIN.—It is a gross piece of hypocrisy!

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—Who is the best judge of hypocrisy? For myself I am always willing to yield to an expert. I am glad I was not at the Exhibition meeting; had I been there I should not have advised them as they were advised the other day by two members who are listening to me now, to make this a party question on which to oust the Government.

Mr. J. H. CATTS.—They were not.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—It is so reported in the Sydney press. My advice

to the public servants is not to make this a party question, for to do so would be to only injure themselves.

Mr. GABB.—It is their only chance.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—Then God help them!

Mr. GABB.—They cannot depend on you.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—The majority of the people of this country, who make the Parliament, are in favour of a decent living wage.

Mr. GABB.—It does not look like it.

Mr. SPEAKER.—I have warned the honorable member for Angas (Mr. Gabb) two or three times.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—So far as I know, all the public servants have asked for is a decent living wage, and I do not know one member of the House who is not in favour of their request.

Mr. FENTON.—What about workers outside the Public Service? Have they not to be considered?

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—What is the good of talking about people outside the Public Service now? In my own State of New South Wales labourers and tradesmen are paid more than the proposed basic wage, some as highly as £1 and £1 5s. per day.

Mr. GABB.—That is because there is a Labour Government in that State.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—There are numbers of workers who are not wage-earners, and who have to pay taxes, such as selectors, farmers, and primary producers generally. Are they to have no consideration? We know very well that if we fix a "wild-cat" wage for the Public Service it will be taken as the standard of wages outside the Public Service. I refuse to be silent under the castigation of honorable members opposite, who seem to think that we are unfair because we are prepared to accept the common-sense proposal of the Government. After all, it is the Government, and the Treasurer in particular, who is responsible for the finances of the country. It is difficult to get accurate figures, but I have been told that the basic wage in New South Wales is £4 5s. I do not know what the basic wage is in Victoria.

Mr. MATHEWS.—It is £2 10s.

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—The honorable member must have been employing somebody recently. In Western Australia the basic wage is £4 1s., and in South Australia just under £4. Living is getting dearer, and my suggestion to meet the situation is that we accept the New South Wales wage as a fair standard. It will be the duty of the Government to ascertain and decide during the next fortnight what, in their opinion, is a reasonable average. We ought to go steadily, and not overdo things, or we may find the scheme tumbling down of its own weight. It would be easy, of course, for the Treasurer to lavishly distribute the public money, but he has not an inexhaustible bank, and he must consider the taxpayers. When proposals are put forward for the betterment of country districts, we are often asked by honorable members, "What about the consumers, as well as the producers?" Let us on this occasion have some regard for the producers, and realize that to our resources there is a limit, which we have nearly reached. My suggestion, however, is the basic wage of New South Wales.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—Are you tipping after the event?

Mr. AUSTIN CHAPMAN.—I am judging from what the Prime Minister said, and I believe he will propose between £4 and £4 5s., and I suggest that we should err on the side of generosity. I shall vote for £4 5s. With such a wage, it is my opinion that the Public Service would be satisfied, and I am not prepared, under all the circumstances to seek popularity and a few extra votes by supporting a higher figure.

Mr. PROWSE (Swain). [3.15].—The scope of the inquiry referred to the Basic Wage Commission was, in my opinion, altogether inadequate. It was a Commission conceived in election times, and that the scope of the inquiry was inadequate is evidenced by the nature of the report and the necessity for additional information. This additional information is the most salient and important of all—even more important than the report itself. The Commission set out to ascertain what is a reasonable living wage for a man, his wife, and three children. The Commissioners estimated variously that amount at the present time to be something in the region of £5 16s. per week, but after the Commission had submitted its report, and had been asked for

additional information, it is found that, in awarding that amount as a basic wage, it is awarding something which is to be provided for 2,100,000 non-existing children. We find that, instead of 3,000,000 children, the number estimated to be possessed, as it were, by 1,000,000 workers, is .90 per cent. for each worker. The report of the Commission, therefore, does not reveal the real position. Again, the Commission was not asked anything in regard to the possibility of the Commonwealth being able to pay the wage it considered adequate. It is highly important that this should be determined. We entered into a war along with the whole of the Empire and certain Allies, and was it expected by any honorable member in this House that we could fight a bloody war of the kind against the greatest military power in the world, continuing it for nearly five years, and still enjoy all the privileges we had before it started? I am sure that many of us felt that if we could succeed in holding our liberty, and living through the term of our natural lives after a struggle of that kind, we would not be doing badly. But the proposition that here in Australia we have a right to expect to maintain a higher standard of living than obtained before the war is utterly unreasonable. I value the supplementary report of Mr. Piddington, the Chairman of the Basic Wage Commission, because it is highly significant. Mr. Piddington says, in fact, and in effect, that the wage of £5 16s. cannot be paid without rendering the Commonwealth bankrupt. In other words, he means that we would be called upon to pay for our production more than would be the value of that which is produced. It is a fanatical and utterly unreasonable request to ask for the payment of this basic wage as recommended by the Commission, and I feel quite sure that those who put it forward are paying too much consideration to their political position, and too little regard to the welfare of Australia. We are also told in the supplementary report of the Commission that if a wage of £5 16s. be granted, trouble will commence in the first three months, because with such an addition to the cost of living, the purchasing value of the sovereign will so decrease that the Commission will need to be called upon again to institute a new inquiry, and fix upon a new standard. And so the vicious circle would continue to the end of things, which would arrive

very speedily. It is impossible for a man to continue for long spending more than he earns. The only place for him is the Bankruptcy Court. If I am called upon to pay this increased wage, particularly at a time when I am selling my wheat to Australia at less than the world's parity, that is to say, if I am asked to continue producing wheat at a very much higher cost, my position will be that I shall expect my children to work night and day for me without the basic wage, simply in order to provide other people with a high wage and cheap bread. If the basic wage is applied, it must increase the cost of production and also reduce production. And it has only to continue long enough in force to extinguish production altogether. Therefore, we must call a halt at some reasonable point

In this House I have said before that the principle adopted in our Public Service is quite wrong. We have nearly 250,000 public servants in the service of 5,000,000 people—one to every ten adults in the Commonwealth. The number is too high altogether, and the services rendered are not sufficiently co-ordinated on business lines. I am thoroughly in favour of the adoption of business methods in connexion with our Public Service, and I was hopeful that the Government would bring forward their Bill, which proposed to institute an inquiry into the management of the Service, and the possibility of adopting business methods. In fact, I would rather we had first proceeded with that Bill instead of dealing with the question of adopting the principle of a basic wage. I would like to see all public servants for whom a reasonable amount of work cannot be obtained in the Departments provided with other work in Australia outside the Service. Their removal would allow the payment of reasonable wages to those who would be left in the Service. The Commonwealth and the States pay £40,000,000 each year to the persons who render public service—I think a different state of affairs would be found if the work were let on contract subject to specification—and now it is proposed that this cost should be practically doubled, and we are asked to pay close on £90,000,000 for the public services rendered to 5,000,000 people. It would be better to follow the advice of the Economies Commission, and rid the Commonwealth Service of men for whom a reasonable amount of work cannot be provided. In this way we could pay

those remaining in the Service a decent salary. Those persons who are so inconsistent as to advocate the payment of a basic wage of £5 16s. per week regardless of where the money is to be obtained with which to pay it, and at the same time urge a reduction of hours of labour, are, in my opinion, rushing headlong to destruction, and trying to drag down everything else with them.

**Mr. RYAN** (West Sydney) [4.25].—

I rise to oppose the amendment moved by the Treasurer (Sir Joseph Cook). A few moments ago we had the opportunity of deciding, on the amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Tudor), whether we were in favour of having the necessary machinery established to enforce the principles contained in the report of the Basic Wage Commission; but the House by a majority voted against the amendment. Now we have an amendment before us of a diametrically different character, because it seeks to excuse the Government, and authorize them not to carry out the findings of the Commission. In the very beginning the amendment states—

That this House approves of the statement made by the Prime Minister on Tuesday, 23rd November.

If we approve of the statement made by the Prime Minister we adopt it as our own. Every honorable member who votes for the amendment says that he adopts as part of his speech, and as part of his views upon the matter, the views expressed by the Prime Minister. What did the Prime Minister say on Tuesday? He said, speaking of the report of the Basic Wage Commission, "I reject it." If honorable members approve of the Prime Minister's action in rejecting this report, let them vote for the amendment. The Prime Minister said also, "I have not made up my mind whether I will stand for the individual memorandum of Mr. Piddington or not." Mr. Piddington was asked by the Prime Minister to prepare a memorandum on the following matters:—

1. The true incidence of the cost of living.
2. How the findings of the Commission as to cost of living may be distributed between (1) man and wife, (2) each of three dependent children.
3. How the said finding of the Commission can be made effective so as to secure for every employee the actual cost of living according to its true incidence, accepting the finding of £5 16s. as the actual cost of living for a man, wife, and three children.

4. The effect upon industry, domestic, and for foreign countries, of making a basic wage for all employees of £5 16s.

5. The effect of that course upon prices and the actual realization of the desired standard of comfort.

6. The effect upon the Commonwealth's obligations to its employees, permanent and temporary, of whatever course is adopted.

Upon these matters Mr. Piddington wrote a memorandum which the Prime Minister will not say whether he accepts or rejects. Therefore, those who vote for the amendment moved by the Treasurer, first of all reject the report of the Basic Wage Commission, and, secondly, do not know whether or not they accept the memorandum made by Mr. Piddington. In his policy speech at Bendigo, the Prime Minister made a specific pledge to the people of Australia that he would appoint a Royal Commission to investigate these matters, and would enforce the findings of that Commission; but this House is asked to excuse him from carrying out that pledge, and to say, "We do not want any findings of the Royal Commission upon the Basic Wage, but we want you to do something which is fair and reasonable." Honorable members opposite want to have another standard set up. Of course, they are not appealing to the electors now, and, although they have been returned upon the pledge given by the Prime Minister, they are now seeking to excuse him from honouring it. They are to share the disgrace that would otherwise rest upon the shoulders of the Government. An honorable member tells me that the Prime Minister did not agree to accept the finding of the Commission. One has only to look to the right honorable gentleman's own words, as delivered at Bendigo, and which are as follow:—

The Government will at the earliest date possible create effective machinery to give effect to these principles.

That is, to the principles that would be laid down in the findings of the Royal Commission. That is a definite pledge, and we are asked now to excuse the Prime Minister from its fulfilment, although the people have sent the Government back to office because that pledge was given, or, at all events, because it was part of the programme which the Government submitted to the people. The honorable member for Yarra (Mr.

Tudor) has submitted an amendment which, boiled down, means this: "Carry out your pledge; give effect, in some way or other, to the principles which are contained in the report of the Royal Commission." The amendment moved by the Treasurer, on the other hand, says, "Will members of the House please excuse us from carrying out our pledge? Honorable members will please take a share of the responsibility with the Government." The Prime Minister says, "I reject this pledge"; and he does not know what he is going to do about Mr. Piddington's recommendation. Now, the Government, beyond saying that their actions will be fair and reasonable, ask us to give them *carte blanche*, to give them authority to fix on what, in their opinion, is fair and reasonable, and to release them from their solemn pledge. I shall not vote for such an amendment, and every honorable member who does vote for it must take the responsibility of excusing the Government from honouring their pledge. Here is the definite pledge, as I have just quoted it; and here are the definite and unanimous findings of the Commissioners, in answer to clause 1 of the Letters Patent, which sets forth that the main task of the Commission was to ascertain definitely the cost of living according to reasonable standards of comfort for the typical family.—

The actual cost of living at the present time, according to reasonable standards of comfort, including all matters comprised in the ordinary expenditure of a household, for a man with a wife, and three children under fourteen years of age, is—

			£	s.	d.
Melbourne	..	..	5	16	6
Sydney	..	..	5	17	0
Brisbane	..	..	5	6	2
Newcastle	..	..	5	15	6
Adelaide	..	..	5	16	1
Perth	..	..	5	13	11
Hobart	..	..	5	16	11

Those are very definite findings, not by a portion of the Commission, but by all its members. So we have this fact before us: It is agreed by an independent chairman, by the representatives of the employers on the one hand, and by the representatives of the employees on the other, that it requires the amounts set out as I have just quoted them to keep a man and his wife and three children in reasonable comfort.

Mr. LAIRD SMITH. — Is there not a minority report?

Mr. RYAN.—The minority report substantially concurs. In fact, those members who signed the minority report assented to the findings above. I am justified in saying that it is a unanimous report, and that, in the opinion of all the members of the Commission, those respective sums are required to keep a man and his wife and three children in reasonable comfort. Will any honorable member say that the totality of production in Australia will not permit of the payment to a man who has a wife and three children of a wage sufficient to keep them in ordinary, reasonable comfort?

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—I think that the great majority of the gold mines in Australia could not pay £5 16s.

Mr. RYAN.—The question is, Is Australia able to pay, out of the totality of its production, sufficient wages to keep a man and his wife and three children in reasonable comfort? I say that there should be enough even to pay a man who has a wife and seven or eight children a wage sufficient to maintain them in reasonable comfort; and there should be some means to provide for such payment.

Sir GRANVILLE RYRIE. — How much does the honorable member suggest should be paid to a man without wife or children?

Mr. RYAN.—I have dealt with this same subject-matter previously in the House, and I have set forth my views at a time when there were not the same high feelings as now. On the 8th September I addressed myself to the Arbitration (Public Service) Bill, and remarked—

In fixing what is to be a living wage for a Commonwealth public servant the Public Service Arbitrator should be guided by what is sufficient to keep a married man, his wife, and three children in reasonable comfort. But no honorable member opposite has suggested that that principle should be laid down. I do not know whether any of them would support such an amendment, but it is absolutely within the power of this Parliament to establish that principle in this Bill. It is of no use merely to listen to speeches from them proclaiming that the Arbitration Court cannot do certain things because this Parliament has not the power to lay down principles. We have the power to do so in this Bill. We have the power to lay down a further principle which it is very necessary should be recognised, and

I hope that some one will move an amendment to that effect. We have the power to lay down the principle that the Public Service Arbitrator in arriving at a decision on the question shall not prescribe any wage less than the basic wage fixed by the Basic Wage Commission now sitting, or by any duly constituted authority that may take its place. We can do that, and I ask whether we are going to do it.

A little further on I said—

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—This is quite out of order. The honorable member is not permitted to quote from *Hansard* records of the same session.

Mr. RYAN.—I am quoting from my memory, as refreshed by a reference to *Hansard*. I merely wish to add that I also pointed out that if I had my way I would go further, and vest in the Arbitrator the power to give a bonus in respect of every child above a certain number. I recall my remarks on that occasion, in order to show that I am not now seizing upon some new-fangled idea, but that I have always stood for what I am at this moment advocating. Why has the Treasurer introduced his amendment?

Sir GRANVILLE RYRIE.—How much does the honorable member suggest should be paid to a man without wife or children?

Mr. RYAN.—What do the Government propose to do? They have the power, and we want to know. We are asked to give the Government *carte blanche*, with this provision super-added, namely, that we release them from carrying out their pledge. Why this sudden desire to do justice to the Public Service? When, during the debate upon the Arbitration (Public Service) Bill, the honorable member for Ballarat (Mr. McGrath) moved an amendment which sought to make it imperative upon the Arbitrator to fix a wage for the Public Service which would be not less than the basic wage as decided by the Basic Wage Royal Commission, we were told that the Government were waiting until the report of that Commission was available, when they would carry out its recommendations. The Government did not then tell us that they should give to the Commonwealth Public Service the same basic wage as has been prescribed by the different States. The honorable member for Eden-Monaro

(Mr. Austin Chapman) did not then suggest that £4 5s. per week should be given to the public servants. When we asked the Government to give a wage about equal to the basic wages of the States, they said, "Wait until we get our own Basic Wage Commission's report. Why should we give what the States prescribe?" Now we have our own report, and the Government say, "Let us give something like the State basic wage." Why do they say that? Because it is less. They will not face the real position. The fact is that the Government and the party behind them have allowed profiteering to become rampant in this country during the past few years that the cost of living has soared. The profiteer has been allowed his full fling. The honorable member for Yarra (Mr. Tudor) showed clearly, in the course of his speech last evening, that while, during the war, there were some rises in wages, the manufacturers made proportionately far greater increases in profits. The cost of living during the war years became so great that some increases in wages were found to be absolutely necessary; but the rise in prices has been far in advance of the increases in wages. Now the Government wish to continue the same policy. They will not acknowledge their mistake, and they say, "The recommendations of this Commission cannot be adopted." The Prime Minister has two replies. First, he says, "As far as the outside workers are concerned, we have not the constitutional power." And then, secondly, he says, "If we had the power to grant this basic wage, the country would be ruined by granting it." As for the first argument, there is ample power in the Constitution to give effect to the findings of the Basic Wage Commission, not only with regard to Commonwealth public servants, but in respect of industrial workers outside. The Prime Minister does not deny that he has the power with regard to Commonwealth public servants; and I remind him that there can be no dispute concerning whether there is power to grant the basic wage in connexion with all matters such as Inter-State trade and the handling of commodities which are intended for transmission from one State to another. The Government have the power to fix a payment, as the basic wage, according

to the recommendations of the Commission. It is of no use, then, for the Government to allege some constitutional difficulty. I say there is no constitutional difficulty, and I assert that with some authority and with some knowledge of the subject. The time has come when this House must make some sort of declaration that will condemn the breaking of solemn pledges. The Prime Minister has broken every solemn pledge that he has made, and their violation has been condoned by the people. Was it not a solemn and definite pledge that the Prime Minister made in this case? Will any honorable member say that that pledge did not mean that effect was to be given to the findings of the Commission? Will any one say that the Prime Minister did not intend to convey to the public of Australia that he regarded the wage of a man with a wife and three children as the unit from which we should build up? If the right honorable gentleman found that he had made a mistake, why did he not at once admit it? Why did he not come to the House, and say, "I find I have made a mistake. I want to be excused from the carrying out of my pledge." The fact is that this is but another illustration of the barefaced making of a pledge in order to get political support, and a subsequent barefaced breaking of that pledge. Honorable members are now asked to be parties to the breaking of that pledge.

Mr. MARR.—This question is only being used by honorable members opposite for party purposes.

Mr. RYAN.—I deny that. The Labour party all through has contended for what my colleagues and I am contending this afternoon. We are not now raising this contention for the first time. Does the honorable member suggest that it is for mere party purposes that we ask the Government to honour their solemn pledge, and that we demand that the large body of public servants with wives and families in starving conditions shall have justice done them?

Mr. MARR.—Honorable members opposite have only just discovered that anything of the kind exists.

Mr. RYAN.—Not at all. The honorable member says that he has spoken in this House before in regard to the matter.

Let me remind him that he and those who sit with him have power to compel the Government to take action. We on this side can only protest and appeal, but honorable members opposite have the power to say to the Government, "You shall do this thing." They do not, however, avail themselves of that power. They talk, but do nothing. Why have they allowed public servants during all these months to be paid a wage of only £3 5s. or £3 12s. a week, although they have wives and families to support? How often must some of these public servants and their families have gone hungry? We know that it is a characteristic of the Australian people to grin and bear their troubles. But during all that time honorable members opposite have had power to compel the Government to take action, and have seen fit only to talk about the matter. Why do they not act? They are prepared now to vote for this further amendment, which excuses the Government's failure to honour its pledge, and says, in effect, to them, "Fix upon whatever you think is a fair and reasonable thing."

I do not wish to make a personal attack upon the honorable member for Parkes (Mr. Marr)—I should be sorry to do so—but apparently he was in Sydney yesterday, since we were advised from there by telegraph that he would make one to remain here until a decision in regard to the basic wage for Federal public servants had been arrived at.

Mr. MARR.—I shall sit here until the debate is finished.

Mr. FENTON.—What is the good of sitting here unless you vote in the right way?

Mr. RYAN.—Exactly. It is useless for us to sit here unless we do something. The House has power to compel the Government to take action, and it is up to us to use that power. All the leading newspapers of this country, which usually support the Government, are ashamed of their tactics with regard to the basic wage. The Government are barefaced enough to make any pledge to a trusting public, and to break their pledges over and over again, merely that they may retain place and power. And to remain in power to do good for whom? For the class that

made the Prime Minister a present of £25,000.

This is only another of a long series of broken pledges on the part of the Government. But in regard both to this and the pledge made with respect to the wheat guarantee, honorable members are asked to condone the breaking of them. They are asked to excuse the Government—to actually vote to excuse their failure to give effect to a solemn pledge, and to give them *carte blanche* to do what they like.

I am going to oppose this further amendment. If honorable members opposite wished, they could even now see to it that before the House adjourns we shall know exactly what the Government intend to do. If the amendment submitted on behalf of the Government is carried, all that we shall know is that they are going to scrap the Commission's report—that they will go back upon it and upon their pledge. If honorable members opposite would take action even now, we could have some definite pronouncement as to the specific amount which will be paid to the public servants of the Commonwealth, and I, personally, shall not be satisfied with anything else.

Mr. MARR (Parkes) [3.52].—I have just awakened to the fact that the public servants of the Commonwealth during the past fortnight have secured from some honorable members of this House assistance which has never before been forthcoming at their hands. I regret that an honorable member opposite was prepared last night to descend to dirty tactics in regard to my position in this matter. According to press reports, he stated that, although there were more public servants in my electorate than in any other part of New South Wales, I had not been in the House during the week.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—Who made that statement?

Mr. LAVELLE.—I did.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—No one takes any notice of you.

Mr. LAVELLE.—Nor of the right honorable member.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. J. M. Chanter).—I must appeal to honorable members to cease interjecting. Interjections are very disorderly, and often lead to misunderstanding.

**Mr. MARR.**—I was here on Monday and Tuesday last, and the statement made by the honorable member for Calare (Mr. Lavelle), as reported in the press, is a deliberate and dirty falsehood. It could only have been made by a man who was prepared to abuse our soldiers during the war, and who did all he could to prevent reinforcements being sent to the aid of the men who were fighting for him and his like. It was, after all, only another illustration of the lack of principle displayed by men of the type of the honorable member. It is typical of the attitude which he adopted and maintained throughout the war.

**Mr. LAVELLE.**—And you did your utmost to—

**Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER.**—Order! I ask the honorable member for Calare not to interject.

**Mr. LAVELLE.**—And I ask you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to see that the honorable member speaks to the question before the Chair.

**Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER.**—Order! The Chair is conscious of its own duty.

**Mr. MARR.**—So much for statements made by honorable members opposite. During the whole of my life I have never attacked a man behind his back, and never will. I shall never say anything in this House concerning an honorable member that I am not prepared to say to him outside. I am quite prepared to give an account of my stewardship to the public servants in my electorate, and to accept responsibility for whatever action I have taken, or whatever statement I have made in regard to them and the basic wage. I had an opportunity yesterday of ascertaining the attitude of public servants in New South Wales in regard to this matter. As a matter of fact, I went to Sydney early this week largely with the object of ascertaining what their attitude was.

I spent twenty years of my life in the Public Service, and I deny that any one has the interests of the Service more at heart than I have. At the present time, this question is being used by honorable members opposite for party purposes.

**Mr. CONSIDINE.**—I rise to a point of order. The honorable member for Parkes (Mr. Marr) has said that honorable members on this side are using

this question for party purposes. I desire to say that my party, so far, has not spoken.

**Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER.**—That is a frivolous point of order.

**Mr. CONSIDINE.**—I wish to point out that it is not at all frivolous.

**Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER.**—Order! I ask the honorable member to resume his seat. The honorable member for Parkes will proceed.

**Mr. MARR.**—I repeat that this question is being used by honorable members opposite for party purposes. Some time ago every honorable member in this House received from Mr. O'Conor, the president of the Agitation Committee in Sydney, a telegram inquiring as to their attitude in regard to the basic wage. As a matter of fact, before that telegram had been sent, I wired to most of the secretaries of the Public Service Unions in New South Wales, and also to Mr. O'Connor, expressing my views on the subject. But never once has a telegram from an honorable member on this side of the House to the Public Service organizations been published in Sydney. I challenged the person concerned in Sydney yesterday. I pointed out that my telegram had not been published, whereas no less than five telegrams from Labour members had been published in the one day. Effect has not been given to any suggestion made by me. There is a deliberate attempt, not only by honorable members opposite, but by certain people outside, to use this question for party purposes. I object to the Public Service being so utilized.

**Mr. MAHONY.**—Mr. O'Connor is a prominent supporter of the National party.

**Mr. MARR.**—I believe that he is entirely in favour of securing the basic wage for public servants only by legitimate means. I do not think that he is trying to stir up strife; but there are others who are, and who gave a deplorable exhibition of larrikinism on the Sydney Railway Station last night.

**Mr. PARKER MOLONEY.**—Who were they?

**Mr. MARR.**—Some of the men taking part in this agitation. They represent only a very small percentage of the Service; but by acting in such a manner they are doing the Service and the agitation in favour of the basic wage no good. The

Prime Minister of Australia, no matter who he might be, should be treated better than Mr. Hughes was treated on the Sydney Railway Station last night.

I consulted Public Service officials in Sydney yesterday as to their attitude in this matter, and the general expression of opinion was that they would be satisfied for the present with the promise made by the Government that probably within the next fortnight they would make an interim payment which would date from the 1st November last. Ever since I have been in this House I have urged that the Commonwealth Service is the worst paid Public Service in the whole of Australia. I repeat that statement to-day. After the reclassification scheme carried out by Mr. McLachlan, our public servants for a time were on a higher plane, but to-day they are the worst paid public servants in Australia. Their salaries have not advanced with the increase in the cost of living.

In order to keep pace with the increase in the cost of living, the Government should have done what was done at the inception of the Commonwealth with regard to Federal public servants in Western Australia. It was found, on investigation, that the cost of living in Western Australia at that time was 5 per cent. higher than in other States, and under a Public Service Regulation Commonwealth public servants there were granted an allowance of 5 per cent. on top of their salaries to compensate them. To-day the cost of living in Western Australia is lower than in several of the States, and I do not see why, for the time being, a regulation could not have been passed fixing allowances to bring up the wages of public servants to the level of the basic wage of £4 5s. per week fixed in New South Wales. Mr. O'Connor, who spoke to me on the railway station yesterday, told me that he was satisfied with the statement of the Prime Minister. There was no justification for sending the telegrams which honorable members received. Members of the deputation came to the train, and endeavoured to drag the Prime Minister out of his carriage. I was asked whether I would remain here to keep a House, and I said that I was a supporter of the Government, and would do anything I could to assist the public servants in getting a fair wage. I am prepared to stay on

now. What occurred at the Sydney station last night was a deplorable exhibition of larrikinism; I can call it nothing else. The main body of public servants remained outside, but fifty or sixty went on to the platform and gave one of the worst exhibitions of larrikinism I have seen. I told some of these men that they were not doing the Service any good, and advised them to go away and hold their meeting without harassing the Prime Minister; that there was nothing to be gained by that. This matter has been used for political party purposes, and the agitation is being engineered largely by the disloyal element in the Service. The best men in the Service are fighting their case fairly, without descending to the tactics that I have complained of. Those who were on the platform last night care only about stirring up disorder and discontent. They have no time for the Prime Minister or any honorable member on this side. There were probably sixty men and six girls on the platform, and only three of the men were wearing the returned soldier's badge, the remaining fifty-seven not having obeyed the call to serve. If I had my way, the Public Service would be cleaned up, and those who did not volunteer for active service, if they were eligible, would lose their jobs. I do not intend to sink the principles on which I was elected. I stood as a returned soldier, to see that the returned soldiers got justice, and I would not stay here to do the underground work of persons who did not obey the call. I intend to hold by the principles for which I fought. Last week, when speaking to the motion of the honorable member for West Sydney (Mr. Ryan), I said that no doubt honorable members opposite had the interests of the Public Service as much at heart as honorable members on this side. But I believe that the country cannot afford to pay a basic wage of £5 17s. I am prepared, however, to hear the matter discussed, and to go to the fullest amount that we can afford. Had the Commission reported six months earlier, its recommendations could have been fully discussed. I hold that the public servant should be paid a fair wage. But I know, from my connexion with the Service, that there are men in it, though only a very small percentage, who have no right to be there. It is, however, very hard to get rid of an incom-

petent man. In some of the Departments I would give the head absolute control of his staff in respect to dealing with inefficient men. As it is, so long as a man keeps within the four corners of the Act, he can carry on, although he may be inefficient. When the Public Service Bill is again under discussion, I shall be able to show how several thousands of pounds could be saved annually by the adoption of a little business method in two branches of the Postal Department. No doubt, honorable members generally wish the public servants to be fairly recompensed, and I think that the Service is satisfied that the Government intend to do a fair thing by them. I regret that the report was not presented earlier; but I am prepared to stand behind the Government in the promise that within fourteen days a determination will be arrived at respecting an interim payment, which will date from the 1st November. I hope that the House will support that.

**Mr. CONSIDINE** (Barrier) [4.9].—The honorable member for Parkes (Mr. Marr) dealt with the public servants from the stand-point of an officer of the Australian Imperial Force. He seems to have unbounded faith in the heads of Departments, and to regard the rank and file as full of disloyalty.

**Mr. MARR**.—I did not say that.

**Mr. CONSIDINE**.—You said that there were a great number of disloyalists.

**Mr. MARR**.—I said that, thank goodness, there was only a small percentage of disloyalists.

**Mr. CONSIDINE**.—On the Sydney railway station last night the honorable member, like a practical politician, counted heads, and finding that there were only fifty-seven persons present, he decided that they were not worth considering.

**Mr. MARR**.—I said that there were about sixty men on the platform, only three of whom wore the returned soldier's badge.

**Mr. CONSIDINE**.—Like the Prime Minister, the honorable member sees treason and sedition in every agitation. He regards discontent as seditious. Apparently, any one who is not satisfied with the *status quo*, and tries to improve his condition, is regarded by him as disloyal or disaffected.

Passing from his remarks, his contribution to the debate being chiefly a vindication of his own prowess in the past, I come to the speech of the honorable member for Franklin (Mr. McWilliams), who sought to draw a line of demarcation between the primary producers and the rest of the workers. I contend that in this as in every other civilized country there is no distinction between the two classes. The country is as much dependent on the city as is the city on the country.

**Mr. STEWART**.—That is not so.

**Mr. CONSIDINE**.—The honorable member did not hold that view when he was engaged in a sea-faring occupation. He was then as useful a member of the community as he is now. One member praises the primary producers, another boosts the manufacturing interests, and a third the Flinders-lane interests.

**Mr. STEWART**.—Did you not say once that you got your majority from the farmers?

**Mr. CONSIDINE**.—The intelligent section of the farmers agreed with my views. The Government appointed a Commission of experts to make an exhaustive inquiry into living conditions, and to say what they regarded as a fair living or basic wage for an average family. The Commission has now presented its report. A minority report, signed by representatives of the employers, contains this significant paragraph—

Beyond expressing an opinion that we do not consider that some of the higher-priced articles mentioned in the indicator lists are indispensable to a reasonable standard of comfort, and recording our view that we are not in agreement with minor matters, after taking into consideration the nature of the evidence, we do not substantially dissent from the general report.

That is signed by Ernest E. Keep and W. D. Gilfillan, commissioners, representing the employing interest. Thus the representatives of the employers, those of the employees, and the Chairman, were in practical agreement that the lowest wage on which a family could be decently maintained was that recommended.

**DISTINGUISHED VISITOR**.

**Mr. SPEAKER (Hon. Sir Elliot Johnson)**.—I have been informed by the representative of the Government that His

Excellency the Governor-Designate of Queensland is on a visit to Melbourne, and is at the present moment within the House. I take it that it will be in accordance with the desire of honorable members if I invite His Excellency to occupy a chair on the floor of the House.

HONORABLE MEMBERS.—Hear, hear!

*His Excellency was then presented to Mr. Speaker, and given a seat in the chamber.*

### BASIC WAGE COMMISSION'S REPORT.

*Debate resumed.*

Mr. CONSIDINE.—What deductions are the working classes going to draw from the action of the Government who appointed this Commission, and who, when the Commission reports after exhaustive investigation—

Mr. PROWSE.—In similar circumstances, what would you do if you could not pay the wage mentioned?

Mr. CONSIDINE.—I give the honorable member the same reply that the Government usually gives to us—wait and see. This discussion will have a great effect on the working classes of the country. The rejection by the Government of the Basic Wage Commission's report is good. It will open the eyes of the working men and women to the farces that are perpetrated in the name of constitutional government, and under the plea of Democracy. It will show them how much the ballot is worth.

Mr. HECTOR LAMOND.—There truly are some curious farces perpetrated under the plea of Democracy!

Mr. CONSIDINE.—And the honorable member is not doing a "star turn" at present. The Government tell us, and their supporters by inference give us to understand, that it is proposed to reject the recommendations of the Commission, and to adopt the New South Wales rate of £4 5s. a week as fixed by the Board of Trade. The Government reject, not a majority report, but, according to the employers' representatives, a unanimous report, so far as the main essentials are concerned, and treat it as so much waste paper.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—A report as to what? They do not recommend that the public servants shall be paid £5 16s. 6d. a week.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—Then what did the Prime Minister mean by telling us so the other day?

Sir ROBERT BEST.—He never said that that is the finding of the Commission.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—According to his own statement, the Prime Minister was so astounded on receiving the report that he referred it to the Chairman of the Commission in order to see how it could be carried into effect. The Prime Minister read the memorandum of the Chairman, intimating the course of procedure which could be adopted by the Prime Minister, if he saw fit, and, of course, by Parliament. The Government now propose to adjourn the House, having taken care to obtain Supply which will carry them approximately to the first fortnight in July. Honorable members will be dispersed all over the country, and the Government will be given a free hand to do as they please with regard to this report. For six months, or thereabouts, we shall have absolutely no chance of even criticising the Government, and if we criticise them outside we shall probably run foul of the War Precautions Act as "repealed."

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—Better say what you have to say in this House!

Mr. CONSIDINE.—I shall also say outside what I have to say.

Mr. PROWSE.—Is the honorable member going home this afternoon?

Mr. CONSIDINE.—The honorable member is so anxious to get his Bill through—

Mr. PROWSE.—I am.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—The honorable member, who is so much concerned about the ruin which will follow this country if the report be adopted, and so anxious that we should return to the parliamentary allowance of £600 a year, now desires to know what about getting home. I thought he was anxious to get his Bill through.

Mr. PROWSE.—If you went home I could get it through.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—If the honorable member was as much concerned about the betterment of the homes of the working men and women by means of a proper basic wage, he would get a great deal more support for his own measure.

Mr. PROWSE.—That measure would help them.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—If the working men and women have to depend upon that kind of help I do not think they will be very much advanced. However, my view is that the Government cannot put this report into operation because the employing interests of the country will not permit them to do so, and, therefore, the Prime Minister who has landed his party in this predicament has to find some other way out. As usual, no matter what the opinion of experts or the evidence may be, the Prime Minister intends to brush them aside and do what he thinks proper.

Mr. CORSER.—The Commission did not recommend anything, but only said what ought to be paid.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—I am sure we all appreciate the unconscious humour of the honorable member. The Prime Minister cannot allow the matter to rest where it is now. If he wishes to remain Prime Minister, he and his supporters must do as their masters, the employing interests of the country, tell them. The only advantage of this discussion is that it will show the people outside what they have to expect from the deliberations of the House, and from Commissions appointed by the Government which is nominally in control of Australia at the present time. The workers, and also the primary producers, have to learn by experience that their interests are in common.

Mr. PROWSE.—That is quite right.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—Honorable members opposite tell us that the price of their wheat and their wool is not determined in this country. That is what I have been pointing out ever since I came here; only last evening I said that the conditions of the world generally—the commercial and international conditions—determine conditions in this country. The honorable member for Swan (Mr. Prowse), and his associates of the Country party seem to take the view that when prices drop in Europe the person who has to bear the brunt is the unfortunate employee.

Mr. STEWART.—That is not a fair statement.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—It is quite a fair statement. Instead of the so-called representatives of the primary producers

joining hands with the representatives of Labour, and endeavouring to take such action as would organize production, distribution, and exchange in the interests of the whole community, they endeavour to shift the burden from their own shoulders to those of the fellow underneath.

Mr. PROWSE.—You belong to the country section of Labour?

Mr. CONSIDINE.—No, I belong to the international section, which I fancy is rather too broad a conception for the honorable member. I remind him, if he does not already know, that the combination for which I am agitating has been adopted by his fellow primary producers in Canada. In Manitoba and several of the wheat-producing districts of Canada, industrialists have joined hands with the primary producers to form a joint Farmers' Labour party, and with very good results. In Europe there is a similar combination against their common exploiters. The Government appointed the Basic Wage Commission at great public expense, and when this unexpected bombshell of a report was dropped into the camp, they simply ignored it, the workers being left to console themselves with reading it, together with the prophecies of ruin, which, according to honorable members opposite, would follow its adoption. It is a curious fact that in every instance where it is proposed to increase wages or reduce hours to any noticeable extent, or to do anything to materially benefit the working classes, the employers' representatives immediately declare that the country is about to be ruined. That was the prophecy when a ten-hour day was sought instead of a fourteen-hour day in Great Britain, and the same argument is used in America at the present time in reference to the exploitation of child labour. Every step attempted to be taken to improve the lot of the bottom dog always produces a crop of Jeremiahs among the capitalistic class, who tell the people that the country will be ruined, and that the improved conditions desired cannot possibly be granted. The only value to be derived from this discussion, and from the report of the Commission itself, is the educational effect it will have on the working classes outside Parliament. It lies with the great working classes of this country, including the great mass of public servants, if they wish to get these improved

conditions, to use their intelligence, their power of organization, and their solidarity, with the object of bringing pressure to bear on the Government to force them to carry out not only the recommendations of the Royal Commission, but also such alterations in the existing social order as will make it impossible again for any Government to suggest the repudiation of its own Commission's recommendations.

**Mr. BELL** (Darwin) [4.32].—It has to be admitted that honorable members of the Opposition, who are only seeking good material with which to criticise their opponents, have scored in this debate. There is certainly fine material for criticism in the fact that the Government, after appointing a Commission to inquire into a certain position—

**Mr. TUDOR**.—And after deliberately promising to bring its recommendations into operation.

**Mr. BELL**.—I repeat that it is fine material for criticism when we find that a Government which has appointed a Commission to make a certain inquiry chooses to ignore the report of that Commission when it learns the nature of its findings. But, although the Government may themselves consider it absolutely impossible to put this report into effect, there are honorable members who would make an attempt to achieve the impossible, namely, to pay a basic wage of £5 16s. per week to the least efficient workman in the community—that is what the payment of a basic wage means—while paying a proportionately higher wage for skill and more arduous work. I am prepared to question the contention of the honorable member for West Sydney (Mr. Ryan) that this Parliament has the power to put into effect this basic wage in all the industries of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Government can certainly fix upon a basic wage for its own employees, even at the amount which the Commission has recommended as necessary to enable a workman to pay for what are considered reasonable comforts; but it certainly would not be right for the Government to fix for its own employees a wage that could not be earned by those doing similar work outside the Service. We must pay our public servants a wage

that will enable them to live in reasonable comfort, and a wage equivalent to what they could earn outside the Service. Otherwise we shall lose the best of them, and the Service will become very much less efficient than it is to-day. Many honorable members contend that it is necessary to give it a complete overhaul. But if we are to pay our public servants a wage of £5 16s. per week for the lightest and easiest class of work, what are we to pay the men working in the mines, forests, and fields, who do hard and rough work? Surely they are entitled to a higher wage than is paid to those who have light employment in our Public Service, and who enjoy all the nice comforts demanded by city dwellers? Of course, if persons prefer to live in the city they can have all these comforts; but if we choose to ill-pay our servants, some of them will have the courage to face the hardships of life, and, being anxious to enjoy what every man desires, a comfortable home, will leave the Service, leaving behind them the worst to do our work, when we ought to have the best. However, if we pay £5 16s. per week to those employed in the Public Service and those engaged in city industries, whose cause the honorable member for Yarra (Mr. Tudor) particularly supports, the men who work in our forests, mines, and fields will be compelled to work for less remuneration, because this wage has to be earned before it can be paid. If a man in the city is paid a wage over and above what he actually earns, it has to be made up from somewhere, and certainly the loser will be the man who works in the fields to provide food at the cheap rate demanded by the city dweller. The honorable member for Yarra and others have said that an industry that will not pay what they consider to be a fair wage should not continue to exist. There never was a greater absurdity uttered in this House. Are we going to close down one-third of our mines in Australia because they will not return £5 16s. per week to all the men employed in connexion with them? Would it not be equivalent to a man cutting his throat because he could not have all the comforts he desired? Would it not be an absurdity for any one to contend that, because rural industries cannot provide all employed in them with a wage of £5

16s. per week, we should therefore cease altogether the production of potatoes, cabbages, fruit, wheat, and other commodities absolutely necessary for the life of the people? There are men employed in the occupations I have referred to who do not earn £5 16s. per week, and who cannot expect to do so in view of the prices ruling for their productions. If all the men employed to-day in producing butter were to receive a wage of £5 16s. for a week or forty-four or forty-eight hours, instead of butter being 2s. 10d. per lb. as it is to-day, it would have to be 6s. per lb. Will the honorable member for Yarra and other honorable members opposite say that because the dairying industry does not return to all employed in it £5 16s. for a week of forty-four hours, they should cease to milk cows and produce butter?

Honorable members must realize that a wage has to be earned before it can be paid. It is perfectly certain that many industries carried on in Australia to-day cannot pay the basic wage which the Commission has said is necessary to secure for the people engaged in them reasonable comfort in life. Royal Commissions have their own way of arriving at conclusions. This Basic Wage Commission took evidence from partisan witnesses on both sides. The witnesses for one side said that they required much higher wages than they were getting, and they gave evidence as to the prices they paid for food, clothing, and rent. I do not suppose that any one will deny that some of the evidence given before the Commission with regard to the cost of commodities and the cost of living was very greatly exaggerated. Witnesses for the other side put the cost of commodities at a much lower rate, and differed from the other witnesses as to the food and clothing required to give a reasonable standard of comfort.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—Did not the purveyors of the commodities give evidence?

Mr. BELL.—They did. The Royal Commission struck a balance between the two testimonies in trying to arrive at a wage necessary to provide for reasonable comfort. I believe that three members of this House, by a little reckoning, could, in the course of a day, decide the real cost of living to-day and the wage

necessary to enable men to live in reasonable comfort, and be very much nearer the mark than the amount fixed by a Royal Commission that has cost thousands of pounds, and occupied many months in its inquiry. I say, without any hesitation, that the proposal put forward by Mr. Piddington in his memorandum for differentiating between married and single could not be given effect, and will not bear examination. It is quite unworkable. I do not think there is a political party in this Parliament that would attempt to put it into effect.

Mr. MATHEWS.—If the honorable member does not hurry, I shall move that the question be now put.

Mr. BELL.—That would not be a bad idea, but I remind the honorable member that honorable members opposite were loud in their protests that they were not being given an opportunity to discuss this matter. I am not taking up much of the time of the House, but I have no intention to permit the question to go to a vote without giving some reasons why I could not vote for the amendment moved by the honorable member for Yarra. I am of opinion that this House should not be turned into a wage-fixing tribunal. We have already too many such tribunals in Australia. Every State has its own. We have a Commonwealth Arbitration Court, and only the other day we passed a Bill to establish a new system by which to arrive at the right wage to pay members of the Public Service. In spite of all these tribunals and Acts of Parliament, it is now proposed that we should fix the basic wage ourselves. If that is not a good example of extravagance, I should like to hear of a better.

Mr. MATHEWS.—It is only the base that it is proposed to fix. The right wage must be built upon that.

Mr. BELL.—If we decide the base it must have a material effect upon the structure to be built upon it by the various tribunals. The members of the Commonwealth Public Service are the only persons with whom we can deal in fixing a basic wage.

Mr. RYAN.—Why does the honorable member say that they are the only persons we can deal with?

Mr. BELL.—I have already presumed to differ from the honorable member for

West Sydney (Mr. Ryan) on that point. In my view, we have no power to fix wages to be paid in industries outside the Public Service.

Mr. RYAN.—The honorable member admits we have powers over all engaged in Inter-State trade.

Mr. BELL.—They represent only a section of the community. I contend that this Parliament has not the power to fix the basic wage to be paid in all industries, and if it has, then, in my opinion, it should not have such power. In the interests of the efficiency of the Public Service, as well as in the interests of justice to those employed in it, they should be paid a fair wage, and one equivalent to what they could earn outside the Service. Further than that I am not prepared to go. As the Government have decided to fix the basic wage for the Public Service I hope that it will be a fair wage after considering what might be earned by the same people in industries outside the Service. Taking the public servants as a whole, they are not, in my opinion, so badly treated as some would indicate in the wires they have sent to me and to other honorable members. If they had to leave the Service and go to work in the back blocks, where there are none of those comforts and attractions such as were described in the course of evidence before the Commission, they would soon learn that they have not been quite so badly treated as some allege. Nevertheless, if the Government decide that the Public Service is underpaid, the wrong must be put right without delay. There is just this, further, that if the Government come to the conclusion that for some time the Public Service has been underpaid, they should certainly have remedied that wrong without waiting for the report of the Basic Wage Commission, the recommendations of which the Prime Minister now tells us cannot possibly be adopted.

Mr. PARKER MOLONEY (Hume) [4.51].—It is gratifying, although the result was disappointing, to remember that a definite vote was taken to-day upon the actual subject-matter of this discussion before the Treasurer's side-stepping and camouflaging amendment was moved. The supporters of the Government, having been caught napping, advantage has been taken of the opportunity to show to the

public servants, and to the people generally, exactly where honorable members stand. To vote in support of the amendment moved by the Treasurer will now be tantamount to indorsing the action of the Government in deliberately breaking the pledge made on the occasion of the last election campaign to public servants.

Mr. TUDOR.—And every workingman throughout the country.

Mr. PARKER MOLONEY.—Also to every working woman; for I, as a member of this party, stand for the principle of equal pay for equal work. Here are the terms of the definite pronouncement of the Prime Minister at Bendigo—

The Government is, therefore, appointing a Royal Commission to inquire into the cost of living in relation to the minimum or basic wage. The Commission will be fully clothed with power to ascertain what is a fair basic wage and how much the purchasing power of the sovereign has been depreciated during the war, and also how the basic wage may be adjusted to the present purchasing power of the sovereign, and the best means, when once so adjusted, of automatically adjusting itself to the rise and fall of the sovereign. The Government will, at the earliest date possible, create effective machinery to give effect to these principles.

Mr. MAXWELL.—That is what they are doing.

Mr. PARKER MOLONEY.—How can the honorable member say that? In what way does the Commission make known its principles? The Commissioners say that such-and-such a rate shall be the basic wage for one State, and that such-and-such shall be the basic wage for another State. Those are the principles of their findings; and the Prime Minister said in his election pledge that at the earliest possible moment the Government would set about giving effect to those principles. The principles were contained in the report of the Commission. The amendment of the Treasurer, if carried, will mean a violation of a definite promise.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—The honorable member will be glad of that. He is always glad when we violate our principles, because it affords him an opportunity to use the circumstance against us.

Mr. PARKER MOLONEY.—It is regrettable, all the same. I am sorry that the Government should violate their principles because of the effect upon the Public Service, and the working people of Australia generally. I am glad that they should violate their principles if the violation will have the effect of helping to get

rid of the Government. Who is responsible for the findings of the Commission? Why was the basic wage established at such high rates? Can the Government relieve themselves of responsibility? The recommendations of the Commission were placed at such a high standard because profiteering has been allowed so to flourish that the purchasing power of the sovereign has been tremendously decreased. If the Prime Minister had not made known to the country that it was not the intention of the Government to carry out the recommendations of the Commission, he would not have journeyed to Sydney in quite such good heart to receive that gift of £25,000. Indeed, he might not have got the money at all unless he had first given the assurance that he did not intend to give effect to the finding of the Commission; or, if he did receive it, it would not have been handed over with such good will as seems to have been at the back of the presentation.

It was pitiful to listen to the honorable member for Parkes (Mr. Marr), whose name has been connected with telegrams received on every side. The honorable member said yesterday that he would make one to sit here and secure a definite vote upon the subject of the basic wage. To-day, he says, "I do not think we can pay what is recommended by the Commission, but I am quite prepared to sit here and find out what is a fair thing." Very well! That is in keeping with the terms of his message to the public servants in Sydney. But what happened here to-day? What was the attitude of the honorable member? He did not rise, and say, "We should be prepared to sit here this week, and even next week until we decide what is a fair basic wage." He did not think it worth while. He waited until a vote was taken, and without uttering a word of protest supported the Government who have violated the pledge they made before the elections. He did not even speak, but when the mischief was done, and the vote recorded, he rose with an intention of expressing certain views that could have no effect.

Mr. MAXWELL.—Honorable members on that side of the chamber appear to take a burning interest in this important question.

Mr. PARKER MOLONEY.—We always have done so.

Mr. MAXWELL.—Where are they now?

Mr. TUDOR.—Down in the Courts, where the honorable member spends most of his time.

Mr. MAXWELL.—Am I there when the House is sitting? Does the Leader of the Opposition think that is a fair statement to make?

Mr. PARKER MOLONEY.—Honorable members on both sides of the chamber realize that the mischief has been done now a vote has been taken. The Government, with the assistance of the Corner party and their docile majority, have said that they are not going to adopt the rates decided upon by the Commission.

Mr. RYAN.—The crucial vote has been taken.

Mr. PARKER MOLONEY.—Yes, and honorable members from this side did not leave until a vote was taken.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—Then, why are you bothering?

Mr. PARKER MOLONEY.—I am uttering my protest against this side-tracking amendment of the Treasurer.

Sir JOSEPH COOK.—How can it be a side-tracking amendment if the crucial vote has been taken?

Mr. PARKER MOLONEY.—I am not going to allow the matter to be smothered up, because the question is of great importance, and affects thousands of men and women in the Commonwealth, and if the Treasurer's amendment is defeated, it will be an instruction to the Government to keep its pledge. It is a matter that should be, and must be, exposed. Of course, it is not unusual for this Government to break their pledges. They had no hesitation in doing so in connexion with their guarantee of 5s. per bushel for wheat at railway sidings. But because they have broken their pledges on previous occasions, that is no reason why they should continue violating the pledges given to the electors. It is the duty of honorable members to publicly expose the Government, and to show clearly that they are not keeping faith with the electors. I have in my possession quite a number of letters which clearly illustrate the unfortunate position in which many of our public servants are placed, but it will be sufficient to briefly quote one or two. I shall

take a case, which is typical of many, of a postal employee who was sent to an irrigation area just beyond my electorate at a wage of £90 per annum, or 35s. per week. This unfortunate employee, although receiving such a small remuneration, was compelled to pay £2 10s. per week for board. Of course, he was not able to do it, and after endeavouring to do so for a while, and finding that he was running into debt, he obtained work with the Irrigation Trust, which paid him £4 11s. 6d. per week. Is this not a striking contrast? In 1914 Mr. Justice Heydon fixed the basic wage for New South Wales at £2 8s. per week. I have before me particulars of a married clerical officer in grade 2, class 4 of the Commonwealth Public Service who was at that time receiving £245 per annum, or £120 per annum above the basic wage which represented an additional payment for skill and responsibility. To-day that officer in the same class is being paid £245 per annum, plus a war bonus of £32, which makes his salary £277 per annum, which means that the amount that he can claim for skill and responsibility apart from his bonus is £21 as against £120 previously. On the basis of the Royal Commission's finding, which provides £5 17s. per week, he would not receive even £30 as an additional remuneration for skill and responsibility, but there would be a deficit of £26, as that margin has been entirely dispensed with. There are a number of other cases which I could mention. In New South Wales, for instance, the railway servants are paid in accordance with a basic wage of £5 5s. per week, and to institute a striking comparison I may mention the wages of the railway telegraphic staff in New South Wales and the postal telegraphic staff. One officer with twenty-five years' experience in a country post-office receives £280 per annum, whilst an officer on the railway telegraphic staff in a town a few miles away with ten years' service receives £315 per year. There is also the case of an officer with thirty-six years' experience who is at present in the Commonwealth telegraphic service and who receives £212 per annum, and one in the railway telegraphic service with six years' service who is in receipt of £255 per annum. There are also two officers, one on the railway telegraphic staff and another on

the Commonwealth telegraphic staff. The Commonwealth employee with six years' service receives £126 per annum, and the State employee on the railway telegraphic staff, also with six years' experience, receives £255 per annum. I do not suggest that the amount paid to the employee on the Railway telegraphic staff is too much. According to the findings of this Commission, he is not getting enough; but it will be seen that whereas a Commonwealth officer in the Post and Telegraph Service receives only £126 a year, an officer doing similar work in the State railway service is receiving £255 per annum, or £4 18s. as against £2 8s. per week. While officers in the telegraph branch of the railway service have been receiving a basic wage for a number of years, not a supporter of the Government, before the presentation of this report, was prepared to utter a word in favour of the levelling up of Commonwealth servants. Not a word was uttered by them in favour of bringing such officers into line with those working on the basic wage operating in the State.

The gentleman who wrote to me in regard to this matter, at the close of his letter, makes the pertinent inquiry—

I would like to know how Mr. Hughes, if he were back in his old trade of umbrella-making, would like to find himself on one side of the street making umbrellas at £2 11s. per week, and another man engaged in the same operation on the other side of the road working for £4 5s. per week.

That is a very pertinent inquiry, which might well be addressed to the Prime Minister if we could find him. Ever since this discussion started this afternoon, he has not seen fit to come into the House to explain why he stands for the breaking of a solemn pledge, for which he, above all other members of the Government, is most responsible. He certainly did come in for a few moments to refer to a telegram, the truth of the statements in which he denied. That telegram was sent to honorable members by the chairman of the movement (Mr. O'Connor) to secure the basic wage for Commonwealth employees.

Mr. LAVELLE.—The Prime Minister attacked him, and later on one of his supporters (Mr. Marr) eulogized him.

Mr. PARKER MOLONEY.—Yes, one of the Prime Minister's most docile

supporters subsequently eulogized the chairman of the movement. We know what object the Prime Minister had in view in referring to the name of the sender of that telegram. He knows that if he can only succeed in dividing our public servants amongst themselves, the whole issue will be side-tracked. And so he resorts to his old tactics. I do not believe, however, that his attitude is indorsed, or that it will be countenanced, by the great bulk of those who sit behind him. It is inconceivable that they could indorse it. When the right honorable gentleman wants to extricate himself from an awkward position, he invariably raises as a side issue something that will appeal to the passions and prejudices of the people. That is what he did this afternoon. It was a most discreditable action. He referred by name to a gentleman who, I presume, was voted to the position of president of the Agitation Committee by the great body of public servants in New South Wales.

Mr. LAVELLE.—And who is also a well-known Nationalist.

Mr. PARKER MOLONEY.—I do not know that. In order to camouflage the attitude of the Government, he refers specially to this man's name, and says that the demand for the basic wage is being made, not by the Public Service generally, but only by a section of it, and that this agitation is being engineered by some hidden force. In this way the Prime Minister endeavours to cover up the shame of his having violated a solemn pledge. He is not likely, however, to bamboozle the Public Service or the great mass of the people. The Public Service of the Commonwealth are alive to their own interests, and will not allow themselves to be influenced by any such consideration as that suggested by the right honorable gentleman in such attempts. I think he largely stands alone.

There is only one other aspect of this question to which I desire to refer. From time to time discussions have taken place in this House, as well as on public platforms, as to the efficacy of Labour Governments in certain States. I have heard the Treasurer (Sir Joseph Cook) say, on many occasions, as was said during the recent Queensland and other State elections, that the cost of living in Queensland, where a Labour Government has

been in power for some years, is not less than that in any other State. We now have the definite finding of an independent Commission that a basic wage of £5 6s. per week is sufficient in Queensland, as compared with a basic wage running up to £5 17s. per week in States where anti-Labour Governments have been in office for years. No one can deny these figures. They show that, as the result of a Labour Government having been in power for years in Queensland, the cost of living there is from 16 per cent. to 20 per cent. less than in any other State of the Commonwealth.

Mr. PROWSE.—That is because of the distribution of population. There is no reference in the report to any Labour Government.

Mr. PARKER MOLONEY.—The honorable member will, of course, put his own construction upon the figures.

Mr. PROWSE.—The position is nearly the same in Western Australia, where there is a similar distribution of population.

Mr. PARKER MOLONEY.—The honorable member cannot get away from the fact that the report of this independent Commission shows that the cost of living in Queensland is less than in other parts of the Commonwealth. If every State had been controlled by a Labour Government, as Queensland has been for some years past, the Commonwealth to-day would not be in the hopeless position of being financially unable, according to the Government, to give effect to the findings of the Commission. These figures of an independent authority prove that, as a result of Labour legislation in Queensland, the people there have a cheaper loaf, and a cheaper breakfast table, and are able to enjoy a greater modicum of comfort than the people of any other State. That is a very pleasing feature of this report. It is sad to learn from it that the public servants of the Commonwealth have been ground down for a number of years, and have been living under conditions infinitely worse than those of their fellow servants in the employ of the States. The Commission has made the fullest inquiries, and has occupied over twelve months in collecting the data upon which it bases its findings as to what is a fair basic wage. There is, therefore, no reason for further delay.

Honorable members opposite, whose only desire is to fall into line behind the Government, now say that the finding of the Commission must go by the board, because they have not had the opportunity of considering it. Surely the findings of the Commission can be depended upon. The members of the Commission have had over twelve months in which to ascertain the facts, and every person in the community who believes in a fair thing will regard as most discreditable the action of the Government in violating the solemn pledge which they made to the people at the last general election.

**Mr. BOWDEN** (Nepean) [5.20].—I am convinced that every honorable member of this House desires to do the right thing by the employees of the Commonwealth. The only question that concerns us is how are the Government going to give effect to the recommendation of the Commission? I am afraid we have got into a tangle because of the different basic wage rates declared by different tribunals. I doubt very much whether these inquiries have produced any very satisfactory results, but it is one thing to criticise a report, and another to suggest a remedy. I regret that the scope of the Commission did not include an instruction to inquire how the basic rate of wage to be declared could be given effect to, and I agree with the honorable member for Yarra (Mr. Tudor) that the first requisite of any democratic country is that its employees shall be paid a sufficient living wage to insure all the reasonable comforts that people may expect to enjoy. We are now confronted with the deliberate statement that it is impossible to pay every employee £5 16s. or £5 17s. per week, according to the State in which such employee lives, which the Commission has declared to be the basic rate of wage for a man, his wife and three children. The Chairman of the Commission (Mr. Piddington), whose opinion must be respected, has made a suggestion as to how the recommendation may be carried out, namely, by paying one rate of wage to the unmarried man and another rate to the married man with children.

**Mr. CONSIDINE**.—What will that lead to?

**Mr. JOWETT**.—It might encourage marriage.

**Mr. CONSIDINE**.—And it might encourage the bosses to get rid of the married men.

**Mr. BOWDEN**.—That statement has been made several times, but so far as I understand Mr. Piddington's suggestion, the employers would be called upon to pay the same wage to all employees, whether married or single, but that in addition to such payment the employers shall pay into a special fund a *per capita* amount for all their employees, married or single, from which a payment of 12s. per week shall be made for each child. This is rather a revolutionary scheme, but it is not altogether new. It is similar, I think, to the proposal made by the Holman Government not very long ago in New South Wales, but which, I believe, was found to be impracticable.

**Mr. CONSIDINE**.—It was turned down by the Nationalist party in the Upper House.

**Mr. BOWDEN**.—It may have been, but I know the suggestion was made, and I regret that it was not given effect to. It might not have been successful, but I think we shall have to experiment along those lines. According to Mr. Piddington, the payment of the basic wage to every employee in the Commonwealth would represent an additional expense of £93,000,000 per year, and according to Mr. Knibbs, an additional expense of £101,000,000. It needs very little thought to realize that this would be an impossible burden for the industries of the Commonwealth. The honorable member for Franklin (Mr. McWilliams) has shown that it would be impossible for some of the most important industries to pay this rate of wage, and that, if it were adopted, they would have to close down altogether. In the interests of the workers themselves, it is only fair that the Government should have opportunity for further consideration of this report. It is generally acknowledged that the wages at present being paid in the Public Service are not sufficient, and the Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes) has promised to increase the amount up to the old basic rate of wage, plus the present purchasing power of the sovereign, that is, the wages shall have the same purchasing power as in 1907. This, it is admitted, is only a temporary expedient for the purpose of giving the Government time to look more carefully

into the recommendations of the Commission, and the drastic suggestions made by the Chairman in his memorandum. The suggestion that the report will be pigeon-holed and forgotten is altogether unfair. The whole position is to be reviewed, and the Government will make a suggestion as to how best to give effect to the report of the Commission, so that every man and woman in the Commonwealth Public Service, at any rate, and, incidentally, all those employed in Australian industries, may get a fair living wage. I do not see anything unreasonable in this proposal. It appears to me to be the only way by which the difficulty may be overcome. For that reason I welcome the amendment proposed, and intend to give it my support.

**Mr. WEST** (East Sydney) [5.29].—As the representative of the city of Sydney, where a large proportion of the population of Australia is concentrated, I feel compelled to say a few words about the report of the Commission that was appointed by the Government to inquire into the basic wage question. It is to be regretted that certain honorable members are in a flippant mood because, in my judgment, no more important document has ever been presented to the Commonwealth Parliament.

The Basic Wage Commission was appointed to give effect to an election promise of the Prime Minister, and no one knows better than he that it was intended that its recommendations should apply to the whole of the industrial life of Australia, and not to the Federal Public Service alone. My Leader (Mr. Tudor) pointed out that the fixing of a basic wage was first discussed in 1906, and in 1908, in what is known as the Harvester case, a basic wage was embodied in an award of the Arbitration Court. From that time unto the present that award has not been reviewed. No exception was taken to the composition of the Commission, because the men appointed as representatives of the employers and employees were closely identified with those sections of the community respectively; nor has it been said that the Commission's recommendations are not based on the evidence which was put before it. Before any matter affecting conciliation, arbitration, industrial peace, and the like, can be dealt with, there must be an agreement as to the basic wage of the industry concerned.

This National Parliament is the only body that can settle the matter for the whole of Australia. Yet honorable members opposite have employed all their ingenuity to prevent a direct vote being taken, and to avoid facing the issue. It will not be disputed that the party in power is under the influence of the employing section of the community, and, when the Commission's report reached the Prime Minister, his first thought was for the interests of that section, not for those of the public servants or of the general community. Therefore, he took steps to obtain a document—which was produced at a speed hitherto unknown—to cloud the recommendations of the Commissioners. I do not think that he should have done that. His course was to take the House into his confidence, so that one of Australia's chief problems might be solved, and the cause of industrial peace advanced thereby. Undoubtedly the Crown, as an employer, should, in its treatment of the public servants, set an example to other employers. But this Government has paid no proper regard to the Federal Public Service. Honorable members generally have complained that the public servants are not paid what they should receive for the work that they do for the community. Will any one say that the people of Australia wish their servants to be underpaid? The State Governments have applied basic rates in the payment of their public services, and the Federal Commonwealth Service should have been similarly treated. As for the cry that the country cannot afford to pay the recommended basic wage, I say that there never was a reform which meant the shortening of hours, the increasing of pay, or the improvement of any condition without the objection being raised that it could not be done, because it would ruin the country. We never hear it said, however, when railway and tramway fares are raised, when farmers are getting 9s., 10s., and 15s. a bushel for their wheat, when the prices of meat, butter, and other foodstuffs are increasing by 100, and in some cases 200, per cent., and when there is a general rise in prices, that the country will be ruined, and that the people cannot afford to pay what is asked of them. The members opposite display a spirit of callous indifference. They show an utter disregard of the interests of the workers. I well remember the occasion upon which

the late Mr. E. W. O'Sullivan, Minister for Works in the Government of New South Wales, decided to increase the pay of railway navvies to 7s. per day. The proposal was denounced by the press as an impossible one, and the cry was immediately raised that the country could not afford to pay it. But, as a matter of fact, the country did pay it, and no serious results followed. This afternoon, the honorable member for Darwin (Mr. Bell) stressed the point that the fruit-growers of the Commonwealth would not be able to grow fruit if the industry were compelled to pay this basic wage. But of what use is it for anybody to produce commodities if the people do not possess sufficient money to purchase them? It seems to me that honorable members have not realized the true significance of the report of the Basic Wage Commission, and how intimately the adoption of the recommendations of that body will affect the daily lives of our people. I intend to send a few copies of that report to the Old Country, and also to America, accompanied by some comments, and I am confident that before very long the Labour party in those countries will be following in our footsteps. What a splendid advertisement it would be for Australia, especially when it is seeking to attract a large stream of immigrants to its shores, if we could point with pride to the fact that we were paying the basic wage which has been recommended by the Commission! As honorable members are aware, a supplementary report upon this matter has been issued by Mr. Piddington—a report containing a mass of figures. The impression conveyed by this supplementary report is that the industries of Australia cannot afford to pay the basic wage recommended by the Commission. I have no hesitation in saying that this country is well able to pay a basic wage sufficient to enable all workers to maintain themselves and their families in a reasonable degree of comfort.

**Sir JOSEPH COOK.** — The honorable member has not said a word about the report. He has been talking all round the world.

**Mr. WEST.** — I can recall the occasion some years ago when an increased wage was being sought by the miners of New South Wales. We were then assured that the industry could not possibly pay it—a suggestion which was vigorously combated by the present Treasurer (Sir

Joseph Cook). He also affirmed that industries which could not afford to pay a living wage ought not to continue to exist. That is not so very long ago.

As a representative of Sydney, I know that I am expected to voice the opinions of my constituents. As I said before, I am sorry that the House has not displayed that spirit and frame of mind which are necessary to the proper consideration of this question. Whether the report of the Commission be a proper one or not, we should have set ourselves determinedly to solve the problem involved. However indifferent honorable members may be, or however much they may try to side-track the issue, it is an issue which must be settled sooner or later. What is the good of our Conciliation and Arbitration Act, or our Industrial Peace Act, unless there is some standard on which decisions may be based? There is no doubt that once a standard is available, much of the work of the Court will be rendered unnecessary, and the congestion of business to that extent relieved. The question of wages crops up in almost every case which comes before our arbitration tribunals, and it is a great pity that one of the most important reports ever tabled should lack proper consideration because of mere political prejudice.

**Mr. FOWLER** (Perth). [5.53].—I have to admit at the outset that I have not given a great deal of study to the report which is the subject of discussion today; but to the extent to which I have dipped into it, I feel that it provides no reliable store of information to enable me to solve the difficult problem that is before Parliament at the present time. This Commission has taken twelve months for its investigations, and has covered a great deal of ground. It has produced a report abounding in much pseudo-scientific terminology; but it seems to me to have missed altogether some of the simplest and most fundamental propositions that ought to be embodied in a report of the kind. The idea of determining a basic wage is altogether a pernicious one. There is no such thing as a basic wage, in spite of the amount of talk devoted to the subject. When the suggestion was added that the Commission should consider and inquire into some methods by which wages may be identified with the rise and fall of the value of the sovereign, I say without hesitation that it was given an absolutely impossible task. I am surprised, indeed, at any practical man attempting

to carry into effect the suggestions embodied in the instructions by the Prime Minister. The Commission deals very learnedly, to all appearances, in scientific terms of quite formidable character. It speaks of "tentative regimen," "calories," and "coefficients," until one would imagine that the members of the Commission are highly technical and skilled experts in these matters. That, in my opinion, to a large extent is misleading the country. I do not think that any of those gentlemen are anything more than amateurs in regard to investigations along these lines, and I feel sure that in some regards they are fundamentally at fault. It is suggested that a basis can be found for the cost of living in the amount of calories—to use the so-called scientific term—required to enable a man to carry on an average day's work. Here is where the mistake is made by the Commission, and it is a mistake habitually made by all theorists in dealing with matters that refer to human beings. The elusive human element is left out of sight or forgotten altogether. When any one talks to me about so many "calories" being required to produce a certain amount of health and vigour, I say, as one who has had considerable association with working conditions of various kinds that it is a notable fact that men who sometimes live on the most meagre diet show more energy, and carry out more work, than others alongside them who eat three times the quantity.

Mr. PARKER MOLONEY.—That is a good argument for starving men.

Mr. FOWLER.—It is a very sensible observation, which I commend to the honorable member for a little more study than he has given to the subject up to the present. I remind honorable members that a certain quantity of goods can be bought from the grocer, baker, or butcher, which, handed over to one housewife, will produce sufficient satisfying and healthy food for a big family for a whole week, while the same materials, handed to another woman, will starve a family in a couple of days. These are facts which have to be taken into consideration. When I am told that it requires £5 16s. to keep a family of five—two adults and three children. I say that, while a man is entitled to that amount, if he earns it, there are numerous larger families maintained, and well maintained, in Australia to-day on

considerably less. I do not for a moment say that there should be anything less than a living wage for everybody in this country; I am merely indicating one of the reasons for discounting, to a large extent, the findings of the gentlemen who constituted this Commission. Then, again, if they had taken into consideration the simplest facts of political economy, they must have realized that, in establishing this basic one to-day, they were creating conditions that would require a recasting of the wage a few days later; in other words, the addition to the extent suggested to the cost of production would undoubtedly increase the prices of production, so that the community would, to use a homely allegory, be exactly in the same position as a puppy dog chasing its own tail. Therefore, I say that the money and time devoted to this inquiry are very much misapplied, and I cannot acquit the Prime Minister himself of a considerable proportion of the responsibility. The suggestion he made was one which is somewhat characteristic of him as a way of getting out of a difficulty, but it was an ill-judged suggestion. He had sufficient evidence before him, if he wished to treat the public servants fairly, to have taken action without waiting for twelve months for this ponderous and unpractical report.

The Opposition have made considerable play on this issue. I suppose it is one of the misfortunes in regard to politics and parliamentary action, that when a subject does offer an opportunity for any party to make good upon, the opportunity will be seized. I am certain that if members of the Opposition had been sitting on the Government benches when this report was presented, they would have had to take up exactly the position that has been taken up by the present Government. It would have been forced upon them by circumstances. There is indeed no alternative offering to any Government in regard to the propositions included in the report.

I admit that the time is more than ripe for some attention to be given to the conditions affecting particularly the lower classes of the Public Service. These men and women have been grossly underpaid for many years past, and the manner in which the vast majority of them have continued to carry out their work under

the unsatisfactory and discouraging circumstances concerning the payment they receive for their duties is highly creditable to them. When one remembers that in the last Estimates large sums were provided for additional payments to already well-paid public servants, one undoubtedly wants to know why the Government did not at the same time take an opportunity to redress the grievances of the lower-paid officers.

Mr. RYAN.—They said they were waiting for the report of the Basic Wage Commission.

Mr. FOWLER.—They may have been waiting for the report. That may be a fairly good excuse; but, in view of the fact that we all recognise that public servants have been underpaid for many years past, if the Basic Wage Commission could not send in its report in less time than twelve months from the date of the opening of the inquiry, then the Government should have taken action and let the Commission proceed as it liked.

The reform of the Public Service as a whole is urgent. There is very much dissatisfaction in the lower ranks on account of the low pay and poor prospects of promotion. What do we find in the higher ranks? It is no secret that, there, are men in responsible positions in the Service drawing very substantial salaries who, if they were in private employment, would be receiving only £3 or £4 a week, and, perhaps, addressing envelopes. I know also that men have been introduced into the Public Service of the Commonwealth—this was some time ago, and I do not think many of them are in it at the present moment—who bought and paid for their jobs. In view of these circumstances, it is high time some action was taken to clear out the useless men, who will very often be found in the higher positions. In that way a saving would be created which could be applied more usefully to the better payment of the men in the lower ranks. I do not say that all the men in the higher positions are of that class. There are many able officers who should undoubtedly be paid much higher salaries than they are getting. I have only to refer to the services rendered to the Commonwealth by such men as the permanent head of the Attorney-General's Department, and

the head of the architectural branch of the Department of Works and Railways, to prove that men who are doing the work they are doing ought to be receiving double the salaries that we have paid them up to the present time. But one cannot conceal from himself, in going round the Departments, that there are large numbers of men in responsible positions who ought not to be there at all. It is high time the system of promotion by seniority was put aside, and some method under which the smarter men in the Service would get promotion substituted, thus doing them justice, and also getting the best results for our money.

There is undoubtedly some difficulty in assessing the wages of public servants, but I do not think it exists to any extent in the case of the lower ranks. If we only took the trouble to inquire as to the wages that are paid for similar classes of work outside the Service, we should have a fairly good guide. When the outside rates are compared with the wages paid to the lower classes of the Public Service of the Commonwealth today, we find at once that there is considerable leeway to make up. I trust, therefore, that the Government will immediately go into this matter and decide, by means of some such basis as I have indicated, what are fair wages for the servants of the Commonwealth. If they have any doubt in that regard, I hope they will err rather on the side of generosity than in meanness, just by way of a change. The rank and file of the civil servants have been very loyal and very reliable in the work they have done, and ought at least to receive a remuneration equivalent to the wages that are being paid outside the Service under conditions of employment similar to their own.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM (Gwydir) [6.6].—The vote recorded this afternoon has fairly indicated the attitude of the members of this House towards the findings of the Basic Wage Commission, which was appointed by the Government. The Commission was appointed to inquire into the cost of living, and to ascertain the basic wage required to support a man, his wife, and three children in a reasonable amount of comfort and decency in a civilized country such as Australia, which is acknowledged to be one

of the wealthiest in the world. That Commission was not appointed hurriedly. We must assume that the Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes) and the members of his Cabinet gave due consideration to its personnel before appointing it; and one would imagine that, having done so, they sized up the probable consequences of appointing a Commission of that character and the possible results of its findings. Condemnation of the Government is, I suppose, looked for by Ministers from members on this side of the House. They are not slow to tell us that we eternally condemn them, and, we think, rightly so, while those who place us here are not slow to show us that they appreciate what we do in that regard, and that we voice their opinions. When, however, we find the press organs of the Government also attacking them over this question, and pointing out their hypocrisy, it is well for members who sit behind the Government to ask themselves in what position the Government, as represented by the Prime Minister, are placing them. I do not think the most biased person in Parliament would call the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* a Labour journal. Yet that newspaper, in its issue of Wednesday, 24th November, discussing the report of the Commonwealth Basic Wage Commission, prints an article with the significant heading, "Typical Bit of Hughesism." This journal refers to the appointment of the Commission, and in an examination of the reasons which actuated the Government gives the history of the Commission as follows:—

The question naturally is asked: If the Commonwealth authorities have no power to fix a basic wage applicable to the Commonwealth, why was this Royal Commission issued? What was to be gained by this lengthy and expensive inquiry if its findings are to be made applicable only to the Federal Public Service, and perhaps a few industries? The answer is found in the history of the Commission. It represents a typical bit of Hughesism. The first announcement about the Commission was made by Mr. Hughes, when, prior to the last election, he delivered his policy speech at Bendigo, on 30th October, 1919. On that occasion he said:—Means must be found which will insure that the minimum wage shall be adjusted automatically, or almost automatically, with the cost of living, so that, within the limits of the minimum wage, at least the sovereign shall always purchase the same amount of the necessities of life.

That briefly discloses the purpose for which the Commission was appointed, apart altogether from the vote-catching aspect of the matter. It was intended that the Commission should lay down a decent standard of comfort for those people in Australia who are obliged to work for wages.

Mr. RYAN.—All that the Prime Minister was thinking about was votes.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM.—Yes; and when the chickens come home to roost in the shape of the report delivered by the Commissioners, he raises the cry that it is impossible to give effect to it. In a lengthy, rambling, theatrical speech in this chamber he claimed that it was impossible for Australia to pay the living wage as laid down by the Commissioners. He said, "The wealth is not in the country." If the wealth is not in the country, it is because the Prime Minister and his party sold the primary products of this country during the war at far less than they were worth, causing the loss of hundreds of millions of pounds to Australia. We have to pay war prices for what we use in our homes to-day, but we have not received for our products the war prices ruling on the other side of the world, to which we were entitled, and which we should have received but for the way in which the Prime Minister bungled things.

Mr. Prowse.—We are not getting those prices now.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM.—The National party, which the honorable member supports, or, at any rate, which he votes to keep in power, is responsible for that. It is the honorable member's own fault. At any rate, the fault does not lie at the door of honorable members on this side. We are not keeping the Government in power. We have it on the word of General Lassetter, of Sydney, a man of high standing in the business world, that Australia has lost £140,000,000 on its wool sales alone. That is the reason why we have not the money in Australia with which to pay a reasonable wage to the people. Now that the Government has repudiated the report of the Basic Wage Commission, the workers will begin to realize how much they have suffered as a result of the bungling of the National Administration. No one can say that the Government did not bungle these sales. The honorable member for Balclava (Mr. Watt), the only member of the Ministry who has been to Great Britain

and inquired into these matters, was not slow to say that some of the things done by the Prime Minister were like the peace of God, which "passeth all understanding." Is it not true that the Prime Minister dominates his Cabinet and his party? Of course, because he is the only one who can keep his meek and humble followers together. But when rogues fall out, honest people come into their own. Through the row in the Cabinet between the honorable member for Balaclava and the Prime Minister, and when these two gentlemen were at one another's throats, we got an inkling of what has been done during the last four years, during which period there has been so much smothering up, secrecy, and undue laxity in respect of those transactions which have been carried out by the Prime Minister.

When the workers of this country and the men in the Public Service endeavour to secure redress, they are met with talk such as we have had from the Prime Minister when he declares that the spokesmen of the public servants are allied to a world-wide conspiracy to overthrow the Empire. No greater insult could be tendered to the Public Service than to refer to these gentlemen in this way, particularly as I understand that he is a prominent Nationalist. He went to no end of trouble to inform honorable members when they were interviewed by representatives of the Public Service in Sydney a few days ago that it was the hardest job possible for him to prevent the Public Service getting into a state of chaos owing to the seething discontent which had manifested itself. He particularly stressed the fact that the position was not being dominated by members of unions, but that it was an aggregation of the rank and file of the Service who were moving in the matter, and had appointed him as their spokesman. The Prime Minister, in order to suit his dirty sectarian ends—I can ascribe his words to nothing else—says that this gentleman whose name is O'Connor is in a world-wide conspiracy to overthrow the British Empire. This vilification of the honest endeavours of men to right the wrongs which are existing in this country only serves to bring about seething discontent. We had an example of the discontent prevailing at the meeting held in the Melbourne Exhibition Building last night, attended by

5,000 members of the Commonwealth Public Service. We have no desire to see chaos in the Service. We want things to move along harmoniously and smoothly. Therefore, we view with regret the fact that one who should set an example to the people of the Commonwealth has seen fit to descend to such petty, childish tactics in order to serve his own political ends, and discredit the great body of men and women who, as the honorable member for Perth (Mr. Fowler) has declared, have been labouring under an undue hardship for a considerable time past. The non-payment of a decent wage to members of the Public Service has been responsible for many of the best men in Australia leaving the Service and going into the open market in order to secure employment under better conditions. There could be no greater condemnation of the Government's administration. We cannot expect to attract to the Public Service the best youths in the community when they learn that there is no future ahead of them if they join it. A friend of my own who occupied an important position in the Postal Department was, after ten years' service, in receipt of £4 2s. 4d. per week. He reached the breaking point, and, as he was unable to support his family on the sweated wage paid him by the Government he had to resign, and the Service is the poorer for his loss. His case is only typical of hundreds of others that might be, and have been, referred to.

When it is suggested that honorable members on this side have taken up a certain attitude with respect to the report of the Basic Wage Commission for party purposes, we might very well retort that the Commission was appointed for party purposes. If, when I voice the protests and opinions of the electors who sent me here, I am to be accused of doing so merely for party purposes, all I can say is that honorable members opposite must have a strange idea of the functions of Parliament. While the Government could find money to increase by 60 or 70 per cent. the wages of the more highly-paid officers of the Service, they cannot find sufficient funds to pay the lower grades of the Service properly until they are forced to do so by such an agitation as has been carried on during the past month.

Mr. Cunningham.

It has been stated that, by raising wages, we are only going in a vicious circle, since every rise in wages is followed by an increase in the cost of living. While the profiteer is allowed to unduly increase the price of commodities, it is no solution of the problem to increase wages. The honorable member for Yarra (Mr. Tudor) has pointed out that the undue profits made by big businesses were made from prices that were proportionately greater in excess of the increase in wages. No effective machinery has been provided during the last four years by this Government to prevent profiteering, and the legislation passed by the present Government has been intended rather to protect the interests of the profiteer than those of the worker. Some members of this House carry on private businesses from which they derive considerable incomes apart from their parliamentary salary, and the struggle for existence does not greatly concern them. Some of them are so patriotic as to say that if the Federal Capital is transferred to Canberra they will resign from the National Parliament. We cannot expect such men to have much sympathy with the hardships of the under-dog, and the sweated worker. Many of the men to whom I refer belong to the class of profiteers who made huge profits out of the participation of Australia in the war.

It would be well if the scales were drawn from the eyes of the people in order that they might understand what Nationalism or "Hughesism" has done for the workers of this country. It has been responsible for increasing enormously the cost of living, and as I have already said, the bungling of the Prime Minister has been responsible for the fact that men who are not wage-earners, but producers of primary products, have not received a fair return for their labour because of the low prices obtained for their products overseas. We have been robbed, and the workers have been robbed, whilst the profiteers are the only persons who have gained any advantage through the present Government being in power. They have looked after the interests of the profiteers, and, either wilfully, or because they lacked ability, have failed to prevent the plundering of the wage-earners of the community.

As one who has worked in Queensland, I am in a position to say that wages have been higher and the cost of living

cheaper in that State than in any other State of the Commonwealth. We know that there has been the grossest misrepresentation of the conditions in Queensland under a Labour Government. It is left to the report of the Basic Wage Commission to vindicate all that we have said about the better economic conditions in Queensland under Labour administration. During the war the worker in Queensland was 10s. a week better off than the worker in any other part of Australia so far as the purchasing power of the sovereign was concerned, and at the same time the wages he received were higher than those paid to workers in the other States. This proves that Labour administration in Queensland was better for the worker than the administration of the Commonwealth Government has been.

Mr. RYAN.—That is why the profiteers hated me so much.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM.—That is why they vilified the honorable gentleman at every turn, and endeavoured to misrepresent the true position of Queensland under his rule. The report of the Commission will do more than anything else to lift the scales from the eyes of the workers of Australia and show them that Ryan does not mean ruin, as was represented by honorable members opposite during the last election. The report of their own Commission has been repudiated by the Government and their followers, but it justifies the Queensland Labour party and the honorable member for West Sydney (Mr. Ryan), who led that party during the war.

*Sitting suspended from 6.30 to 8 p.m.*

Mr. CUNNINGHAM.—I desire to point out how the campaign of misrepresentation of Queensland was carried on throughout Australia to the disadvantage of the workers, as proved by the report of the Commission which the Government have now refused to accept and adopt. I desire only to warn the people against the renewal of this campaign. The Government are aided in their misrepresentations by a press which has indulged in profiteering just as vile as, if not viler than, any other branch of the vile business. The daily press of the cities has even gone so far as to con-

siderably increase the price of war loan advertisements, as well as to exploit the relatives of deceased soldiers by doubling the cost of death notices and the like. The party to which I belong does not rely upon the support of corporations which adopt such profiteering tactics as these. The Labour party has no need to state its case through such sources. From the utterances and indications given by the Prime Minister to-day, there can be no doubt that he is about to launch a new campaign of misrepresentation to serve, apparently, for some future contingency. I warn the people against accepting any so-called political news that appears in the daily press. Let them look for misrepresentations rather than the truth, and they will not be disappointed. There is only one journal in the land from which accurate records of the proceedings of Parliament can be obtained. I refer to the official publication of *Hansard*, which may be obtained from the Government Printer for 2s. 6d. per session. All Labour supporters in the community should arm themselves by means of *Hansard* with the facts concerning what goes on in the Australian Parliament, in order to be able to disseminate the real truth among the workers of Australia. One can hardly wonder that some of the latter are apt to be carried away by the persistent untruths published in the organs of our political opponents. I have no doubt that some new lie will be sprung upon the people for the next Federal elections — something fresh, but after the manner of such lies as "Ryan means ruin," and those other canards concerning Queensland. From the exhibition of tactics afforded by the Prime Minister to-day it would appear that the new lie will have something to do with an alleged world-wide conspiracy for the defeat and overthrow of the Empire. I am reminded by the Prime Minister's methods of the trick sometimes played by little boys. A young mischief-maker turns on a tap, and, after a good deal of water has run to waste, he turns it off again. Then he runs inside to his mother and tells her he has saved water by turning off the tap. The idea of the Prime Minister is to manufacture a scare — to stage-manage some bogey, just as we have been

informed by the honorable member for Balacala (Mr. Watt) that the Prime Minister stage-managed his welcome home by returned soldiers. Then, having launched his scare, and played on the feelings of the people, he steps forth as the hero who has arisen to protect and save the community from the dire disaster which he himself had manufactured. I have no doubt that tactics such as these will again be resorted to. The Prime Minister is endeavouring to mislead the people now regarding the millions of money lost to the community by his bungling. I do not believe that any amount of spoken truth will have the slightest effect upon the supporters of the Prime Minister in influencing their attitude towards the amendment. The secret junta has met in its party room upstairs. The whole matter of the basic wage has been discussed and decided upon, and the most cogent arguments which honorable members on this side could advance would now be unavailing. The Prime Minister and his supporters appointed the Commission to catch votes. Now they have repudiated its report, and they give, as a reason for so doing, the excuse that the Commonwealth cannot pay its servants a decent living wage. However, the people will be the judges of that. If the Commonwealth cannot pay a fair thing it will be because the primary products of Australia, during the past four years, have been practically given away to people on the other side of the world, with the result that the workers of this country have to sweat and pay more than ever for domestic necessities. All this is because of the bungling and mismanagement of the Government, ruinously led, as it is, by the Prime Minister.

**Mr. ATKINSON** (Wilmot) [8.8].— Many members of the Public Service are not getting anything like the remuneration which they should receive; but when the Government are asked to pay a basic wage of £5 16s. 6d. the question inevitably arises whether the resources of the country can stand the strain. I have been engaged upon urgent public business away from this House, and, unfortunately, I have not yet had time to peruse the report of the Commission as carefully as I intend. The payment of

a basic wage is so huge in its importance and effect that the Government cannot be expected to deal with it offhand. I believe that our public servants should be paid more than they are getting, in the main. They should receive the best wage we can give them, commensurate with reason. But if we pay them more than the country can afford our action will be, not only unreasonable, but ruinous. It would not be fair to the Service. I believe that when a majority of its members know that an honest attempt is being made to mete out justice to them, and after they have had an opportunity of carefully considering the report and realizing what is involved, they will be quite prepared to abide by the decision of the Government. I am anxious to see the public servants adequately paid; but I do not wish to express a definite opinion at this juncture, particularly when we do not know exactly what additional expenditure the country can carry. There is reason in all things, and I know the members of the Public Service will be among the first to admit that there must be some limitation on our capacity. The Commonwealth public servants, in common with other public servants, are in a very strong position in one sense, because when they are permanently appointed on the staff of any particular Department they are there until they reach the retiring age—that is, of course, if their behaviour has been satisfactory. The same cannot be said of men who are in private employment, because if their services are not needed they can be dispensed with. For that reason, if for no other, Commonwealth public servants are in a comparatively safe position, and if work cannot be found for them in one Department there is no difficulty in transferring them to another. The public servants, of course, feel keenly, as do other members of the community, the appalling increase in the cost of living, and if we are going to pay £5 16s. a week, it will naturally mean that employers outside will be forced to follow, with the result that prices will be increased to such an extent that their position will not be improved in the slightest degree. It will simply be pursuing a vicious circle. If the basic rates mentioned in the report were to be adopted, the primary producers would, of course, be penalized, and the cost of everyday commodities would rise to an alarming extent. Do honorable members oppo-

site think that if these rates were enforced that our primary and secondary products would remain at present prices? In such circumstances increased wages would be of little value, and the Government are taking a very wise step in adopting the course suggested. The Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes) has made a fair offer in saying that the Government will go into the matter, and within a fortnight will announce what they consider a fair wage, which will operate from the 1st November. That is a reasonable proposal, and if we debated the matter for days I do not think a more satisfactory one could be suggested.

Mr. GREGORY (Dampier) [8.14].—I do not wish to give a silent vote on this question, more particularly as I am in somewhat of a quandary. I certainly would not have voted for the amendment submitted by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Tudor), and I find myself confronted with a considerable difficulty in voting for the amendment moved by the Treasurer (Sir Joseph Cook). I do not suppose any report has come before this Parliament that is of greater importance than that which has been submitted by the Basic Wage Commission. It has far-reaching tendencies, and I question whether there is one member in this Chamber who has had an opportunity of thoroughly grasping its import. Although I have perused extracts from the document in the newspapers, it was not until this afternoon that I received a copy of the report. I doubt very much whether any honorable member has read the whole of it, and I do not think any member would give a vote which may be the means of doing serious injury to the future prosperity of the Commonwealth. If the Government agree to pay a basic wage of £5 16s. per week, it would not rest with the Public Service alone, but it would have to become the basic wage for the whole Commonwealth. It would be absurd. I always consider that the members of the Public Service are holding permanent positions, and obtain benefits that are not enjoyed by those in private employment. I am not attacking members of the Opposition, but they are demanding that the rates mentioned in the report should be adopted.

Mr. TUDOR.—We are asking the Government to keep their pledge.

Mr. GREGORY.—That may be a good party weapon, and I would use it if I were in Opposition. I would not have the slightest compunction, because I think it is only fair to draw attention to the Prime Minister's policy speech. If I were on the other side of the chamber, I would make it my pivot of attack.

Mr. RYAN.—The Prime Minister has broken his pledge.

Mr. GREGORY.—But he has a duty to the community.

Mr. RYAN.—I realize that.

Mr. GREGORY.—And the honorable member voted for the amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition, in which he asked that the rates mentioned by the Commission should be adopted forthwith. I ask the honorable member for West Sydney (Mr. Ryan), in all earnestness, if the payment of such a basic wage throughout the Commonwealth would not result in disaster and ruin to Australia?

Mr. MATHEWS.—No.

Mr. GREGORY.—The honorable member for Gwydir (Mr. Cunningham) admitted that it is useless to increase wages unless the cost of living could be controlled.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM.—I suggested that the Government should control profiteering.

Mr. GREGORY.—Does it not follow?

Mr. MATHEWS.—If you want to control the cost of living, you must pay good wages.

Mr. GREGORY.—The honorable member for Melbourne Ports (Mr. Mathews) has, I know, been busy during the week, and has had very little time to peruse the report. He may have read it, and, if he has, I ask him what the result would be if a basic wage of £5 16s. a week were paid throughout the Commonwealth?

Mr. MATHEWS.—It would be beneficial to the workers.

Mr. GREGORY.—Would it? Does the honorable member think for a moment that many of our important industries would be carried on for a day if that was the ruling rate throughout Australia? Take the Kalgoorlie mines, where there are 6,000 or 7,000 men employed; I do not believe that two mines in the whole of the western State—I will go that far—would be kept in operation for a day in such circumstances.

Mr. Prowse.—What of the farmer, who works twenty-four hours a day?

Mr. GREGORY.—Yes; what of the wheat-grower? In considering the requirements of the man who works for wages, we must not forget the farmer, who is always on duty, and carrying enormous responsibilities.

Mr. RYAN.—I suppose the honorable member admits that the Prime Minister has broken his pledge?

Mr. GREGORY.—I will not admit that yet.

Mr. BRENNAN.—That will come later.

Mr. GREGORY.—Oh, no! Honorable members opposite who believe that he has must remember that due regard must be paid to the future welfare of the country. Such an important document as the Commission's report should be most carefully considered before a decision is arrived at, and should not be accepted by this Parliament without question.

Mr. PARKER MOLONEY.—Has the honorable member read the Prime Minister's speech?

Mr. GREGORY.—I am not going to be guided, or allow my vote to be influenced in the slightest by any statement of the Prime Minister, because I believe he has blundered by interfering with huge concerns over which he should not have attempted to exercise control. We have not the experience necessary to enable us properly to deal with these matters. I do not include in that statement the honorable member for Barrier (Mr. Considine).

Mr. CONSIDINE.—I am rather surprised at the honorable member's open confession that we are not competent to deal with the things with which we pretend to be able to deal.

Mr. GREGORY.—I am convinced that our present wretched industrial conditions are due largely to the interference of men like the honorable member in the industrial affairs of Australia. Australia should be, and probably would be, one of the most prosperous parts of the Empire but for the influence of such men.

Mr. RYAN.—What does the honorable member think of the Chairman's memorandum to the Prime Minister?

Mr. GREGORY.—I have not had time to carefully consider it, but after

signing a report in which the Commission tells us that a basic wage of approximately £5 16s. per week should be fixed, Mr. Piddington, in a memorandum to the Prime Minister, states that—

At present the industries of the Commonwealth pay as if the children in the Commonwealth were 3,000,000 (*i.e.*, three children for each of 1,000,000 employees). In point of fact, the children of employees in the Commonwealth number 900,000.

In other words, we are asked to fix a basic wage on the assumption that there are 3,000,000 children of employees in the Commonwealth when, as a matter of fact, there are only 900,000. The Chairman goes on to point out that—

Thus industries now pay for—

450,000 non-existent wives,  
2,100,000 non-existent children.

There is little doubt that the present quasi-submergence of employees with families is due to ignoring the true incidence of the actual cost of living. From the produced wealth of the country, its children have less than enough in order that the unmarried childless may have more than enough.

Are we then to adopt a finding under which a certain section would have less than enough, and another section more than enough to live on?

I have nothing to say as to the merits or demerits of the report, but it would be absurd for the House to pass any resolution which would force the hands of the Government until an opportunity had been afforded for the most mature consideration. Honorable members who claim specially to represent the wage-earners should carefully consider what effect the adoption of the findings of the Commission would have on the future of this country. If, as a result, large numbers were thrown out of employment, we should have a state of chaos. I am sure that honorable members opposite do not want that sort of thing; that they are just as anxious as we are to build up prosperous conditions in Australia.

I throw upon the Government the whole responsibility in regard to this matter. They appointed this Commission; they believe in commissions of inquiry to investigate various subjects, and they approve of government interference with our industries. I, on the other hand, am opposed to anything of the kind. The Government have submitted

an amendment under which we are invited to approve of the Prime Minister's past promises. I do not approve of them. I agree with him, however, that labour is entitled to a fair share of the wealth it produces.

Mr. MATHEWS.—I do not. I hold that labour should get all that it produces.

Mr. GREGORY.—Then my honorable friend should have been a member of the party headed by Mr. Lane, which sought, a good many years ago, to establish a Utopia in Paraguay.

Mr. MATHEWS.—But what I say is true economics.

Mr. GREGORY.—It is not. We must have capital and labour, and brains to control, and we should pay well for the brains.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—I do not quarrel with that.

Mr. GREGORY.—I am satisfied that the drift which has set in in this country is owing to interference by the honorable member and his party, as well as by the Government, in matters relating to capital and labour.

Mr. RYAN.—Is the honorable member prepared to move to amend the further amendment submitted by the Government by substituting the word "disapproves" for the word "approves."

Mr. GREGORY.—I am not going to move any amendment. The hour is too late. Another point is that I have not had an opportunity to peruse the report of the Commission, let alone digest it. I obtained a copy of it only this afternoon.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—Why did not the honorable member say at the outset of his speech that he had not perused the report?

Mr. GREGORY.—Even if the honorable member were to read it a dozen times he would still be unable to take any but a biased view of it. The Prime Minister says that labour is entitled to a fair share of the profits it produces. I agree with him, but the question is as to how we can help labour to obtain that fair share. The adoption of the Commission's recommendations would not help, in the slightest degree, to that end. If we do anything that leads to the destruction of industry we must have a corresponding reduction in employment. Incalculable injury would be done to the country if we fixed upon a basic wage which must create unemployment.

Mr. RYAN.—Does the honorable member suggest that a man who has a wife and three children should not receive, in this State, a wage of £5 16s. per week?

Mr. GREGORY.—I am not suggesting anything of the sort. But what would the honorable member do in regard to the wage of a man with a wife and three children, and that of a man who is childless?

Mr. RYAN.—Read my speech. It is in *Hansard*.

Mr. GREGORY.—The honorable member thinks that the State should step in. We know that efforts were made in New South Wales by Mr. Holman to frame a scheme under which, as Mr. Piddington suggested in his memorandum, married men with children would receive special assistance and succour. But when you interfere in these matters you must inevitably create trouble for yourselves. Is not the common sense of this Parliament sufficient to enable us to originate a system under which the worker would get a fair share of the profits from his labour? Whenever we talk about co-operation, we are met with opposition from the Labour party, but I believe it is possible, under some such system, to insure for the worker a fair share of the profits. There are difficulties, I know, in regard to many industries; but we should try to evolve some scheme to increase production. This adoption of the recommendation of the Basic Wage Commission will limit production.

Mr. BRENNAN.—How?

Mr. GREGORY.—Because so many of our industries cannot afford to carry such a burden. They will be forced to close down. In any case, under our present economic conditions, any increase in the cost of production will be passed on to the consumer.

Dr. EARLE PAGE.—And they say that if an industry cannot pay the basic wage it ought to close down.

Mr. GREGORY.—That is what is said about some of our industries. So far as I am concerned, I want to throw the whole of the responsibility upon the shoulders of the Government. They have not yet had time to digest the findings of the Commission. This could not be done in a week or a fortnight, and so they should have time. They have made a promise which, I think, should satisfy honorable members opposite. They have

said that they will pay certain increases to the public servants, pending a closer investigation of the problem, and that the whole matter will be dealt with when Parliament re-assembles.

Mr. PARKER MOLONEY.—The trouble is the Government will promise to do anything to-day, and will break their promise to-morrow.

Mr. GREGORY.—In any case, the responsibility must rest entirely upon the Government. They appointed a Commission, and we should now be prepared to give them time to mature their plans in regard to the recommendations of that body. If the Government should propose to do something that would be injurious to the industries of this country, it would be the duty of this Parliament to call them to account.

Mr. BRENNAN.—That's right. Those who throw boomerangs must dodge them.

Mr. GREGORY.—There will be no dodging this issue. I feel very dubious about the result of any action that is going to be taken by the Government in connexion with this matter. Time after time I have said that I believed that if, when the war started, we had been able to look ahead, we could have appointed some special Board to deal with the cost of living problem and, as costs rose, wages could have been increased correspondingly. I also said that the Government should have brought in legislation to limit war profits. No big organization should have been allowed during the war to make one sixpence extra profit than they made prior to the war—I would have supported legislation to compel these big organizations to hand over the whole of the surplus profits to the Treasury, after allowing, of course, a reasonable amount for interest. Many of our big trading organizations made enormous profits. They took every advantage of any shortage in supplies to force prices up. I can quite understand the worker getting restless about the increased cost of living. The House should accept the proposal of the Government, and throw the whole of the responsibility upon them. Give them time to mature their plans, so that they may come before Parliament when next we meet, and tell honorable members what will be the effect of this basic wage upon our industries. We have no right to force the Government to give effect to this recommendation until we

are satisfied what its effect will be upon the community generally. If we do as I suggest, then when Parliament meets again, we will have all the information which the Government have been able to compile in the meantime, and be in a position to indorse their proposals, or place some others in power who will devise some other means of giving fair play to the worker without doing injury to the community.

Mr. LAVELLE (Calare) [8.36].—If I did not know honorable members opposite as well as I do, I would preface my remarks by sympathizing with them in the unenviable position they occupy, but knowing them as I do, instead of offering sympathy to them, I extend them my whole-hearted contempt.

Mr. FLEMING.—That does not matter.

Mr. LAVELLE.—My cabbage soldier friend interjects that it does not matter. I feel sure, Mr. Speaker, that when he says that he is speaking the truth. It does not matter to him how many promises his party breaks. It does not matter to him how many election pledges the Prime Minister makes and breaks. So long as his party can remain upon the Treasury bench, it matters not to him or any one else on the other side of the House, how they retain their position. If I did not know honorable members opposite so well as I do, I would have been surprised if I had been told that we could have such a succession of broken pledges as has been our experience during the last ten or twelve months. When the Prime Minister was before the electors last year, he realized that, as he was in a dangerous position, he would have to make a bold bid for support. Consequently, he made several promises, including one to the wheat-growers of Australia, to whom he guaranteed the payment of 5s. per bushel at railway stations. That promise was interpreted by the farmers as it was meant to be interpreted. They thought that they were going to receive 5s. cash on delivery. Yet what do we find? Many months elapsed after Parliament re-assembled without anything being done, so honorable members on this side of the House decided to force the hands of the Government, if possible, in order to have the promise honoured. We know, of course, that it has been dishonoured, and that every honorable member on the other side

of the House voted to assist the Government in dishonouring this promise. We also know what has happened in connexion with the war gratuity bonds. Almost every returned soldier is in financial difficulties owing to the high cost of living. Honorable members opposite may laugh at the idea that the soldiers, the majority of whom belong to the working classes, should be in financial difficulties. If they had their way, the working classes would always be in financial difficulties. If they adopt the amendment now before the House, the working classes will continue to be in financial trouble. It appears to be a matter of mirth with them that any honorable member on this side of the House should mention that returned soldiers, in spite of all they have done for this country, and in spite of the promises made by the Government, are in financial difficulties to-day, and that they should have expected the Government's pledge to be honoured by getting their gratuity in cash.

Mr. SPEAKER (Hon. Sir Elliot Johnson).—Order! I must ask the honorable member not to make a series of gross reflections upon honorable members. He has not touched the question before the Chair yet.

Mr. LAVELLE.—I am endeavouring, Mr. Speaker, to show a connexion between broken promises given at the last election, and the subject now under discussion.

Mr. SPEAKER.—The honorable member is doing something more than that. The effect of the honorable member's remarks, although he may not realize it, is to cast the gravest reflections on other honorable members.

Mr. LAVELLE.—I am sorry that honorable members opposite are responsible for conduct the criticism of which is a reflection upon them.

Mr. SPEAKER.—The honorable member imputed unworthy motives, and it is contrary to the Standing Orders to do that.

Mr. LAVELLE.—If you will not allow me, sir, to deal with the other broken promises of the Government, I shall deal with that now before the House.

Mr. SPEAKER.—I think that the honorable member misunderstands me. I do not rule that he may not refer to broken promises if he thinks that promises have been broken; but I remind

him that it is a breach of the Standing Orders to impute to other honorable members unworthy motives. They may have been actuated by the best motives in taking what he may regard as a wrong course of action. He is quite within his rights in adversely criticising.

Mr. LAVELLE.—I can only express my regret that you were not in the chair this afternoon, or that, if you were here, you did not draw the attention of a previous speaker to the fact that he was imputing motives.

Mr. SPEAKER.—I would have done so had I noticed it.

Mr. LAVELLE.—I unreservedly accept your assurance, knowing how fair-minded you are, and how you always endeavour to treat honorable members impartially, no matter where they sit. I was referring to the honorable member for Parkes (Mr. Marr). He complained that last night at a public meeting I attacked him behind his back, and he asked me to repeat here or outside what I have said at that meeting. I shall do so. I first read this telegram—

The Prime Minister has definitely promised if twenty-four members agree Parliament will not adjourn before decision *re* basic wage for Federal employees. Major Marr will make one; will you make another?

Mr. MARR.—You also said that I had not been in the House this week.

Mr. LAVELLE.—I went on to say that had the Government supporters had their way yesterday, the Standing Orders would have been suspended to enable the Government to keep the House sitting continuously until the business was disposed of, in which case this question would have been talked out, or would have been brought forward when honorable members were too weary, after an all-night sitting, to intelligently follow the debate. I complained that the honorable member had said a couple of weeks ago that the Labour party was making a party question of this matter, and that he had said that he had spoken more than any other honorable member on behalf of the public servants. My comment was that he may have spoken on their behalf, but that he was one of the most servile supporters of the Government, a statement that was cheered to the echo. I added that in this House it was votes which counted; that what mattered was not how a man spoke, but how he voted. I was in error in stating that the honorable member had not been in the House

this week. I have since ascertained that he was here; but he took such an insignificant part in the proceedings that I did not notice him. I went on to say that the party to which I belong is not seeking to make political capital out of this question. I do not think there are 200 public servants in my electorate.

Mr. MARR.—Thank God for that!

Mr. LAVELLE.—If I did not treat them better than you treat those in your electorate there might be justification for that ejaculation. I said that the Labour party did not ask for the votes of the public servants; that its endeavour was to see justice done to every section of the workers, whether they were Labour supporters or not.

Mr. MAXWELL.—Loud applause!

Mr. LAVELLE.—Yes, because the 8,000 men and women who were present knew that I was sincere, and was speaking the truth. It is justice for which we are asking to-night, and for which we asked when we moved the amendment.

Just before the last election the Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes), in his endeavour to secure a further lease of office, made certain promises to the electors. Speaking at Bendigo, he said—

The Government is, therefore, appointing a Royal Commission to inquire into the cost of living in relation to the minimum or basic wage. The Commission will be fully clothed with power to ascertain what is a fair basic wage, and how much the purchasing power of the sovereign has been depreciated during the war; also how the basic wage may be adjusted to the present purchasing power of the sovereign, and the best means, when once so adjusted, of automatically adjusting itself to the rise and fall of the sovereign. The Government will at the earliest date possible create effective machinery to give effect to these principles.

The Commission was appointed, and clothed with the necessary powers. After a thorough investigation it was reported that it cost in Melbourne £5 16s. 6d., in Sydney £5 17s., in Brisbane £5 6s. 2d., in Newcastle £5 18s. 6d., in Adelaide £5 16s. 1d., in Perth £5 13s. 11d., and in Hobart £5 16s. 11d. for a man to keep himself, his wife, and three children, living in that standard of comfort which a human being in a civilized community should enjoy. The Prime Minister and his Cabinet were absolutely staggered at the findings of the Commission, which were unanimously arrived at by the members of that body. Therefore, the right honorable gentleman asked the chairman of the Commission alone to supply him

with another report. As has been pointed out by every honorable member who has spoken from this side of the Chamber, it is a remarkable thing that the Prime Minister did not ask any other member of the Commission for a further report. However, the fact remains that he asked Mr. Piddington, and that, between 5 o'clock one afternoon, when the request was made, and 9 o'clock the same evening, that gentleman presented a supplementary report to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister then came down here, laid the report of the Commission upon the table of the House, and, following his customary tactics, quoted extensively from the supplementary report which had been furnished him by Mr. Piddington. Had not attention been called to this matter, the impression would have gone forth that the right honorable gentleman was reading from the report of the Commission itself. He concluded his remarks by moving "That the paper be printed." Had that motion been carried, the papers would have been printed, and nothing further would have been done. But, as honorable members upon this side of the Chamber were anxious to insure justice being meted out to our Commonwealth public servants, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Tudor) submitted an amendment to add to the motion the following words:—

And, in accordance with the definite pledge given by the Prime Minister in his policy speech at Bendigo on 30th October, 1919, the Government should give immediate effect to the findings of the Commission.

One would have thought that that amendment would have been acceptable to honorable members upon both sides of the Chamber, and particularly to Ministerial supporters. It simply asked for the honouring of a pledge. The Commission had reported upon the wage which it considered necessary to enable a man to support his wife and three children in a reasonable degree of comfort. There is not an honorable member in this Chamber who dares to go before the electors and say that a man ought not to receive a wage sufficient to enable him to maintain his wife and family in comfort. Had honorable members opposite been sincere, they would have voted for that amendment, the adoption of which would have given effect to the finding of the Commission.

Mr. ATKINSON.—Regardless of whether the basic wage which the Commission recommended could be paid or not.

Mr. LAVELLE.—It is a good job for the honorable member for Wilmot (Mr. Atkinson) that the Royal assent has not yet been given to the Bill which we passed through this Chamber a night or two ago. The honorable member is following in the footsteps of the Prime Minister when he says that the whole productive wealth of Australia is not sufficient to enable our men and women to live up to a reasonable standard of comfort. What a libel upon Australia for a member of this Parliament to utter!

Mr. ATKINSON.—I have never said anything of the kind.

Mr. JOWETT.—Did he say that?

Mr. ATKINSON.—Perhaps the honorable member will show us how we can pay a basic wage of £5 16s. 6d. per week.

Mr. LAVELLE.—If the honorable member and other honorable members opposite wished to ascertain how it could be paid, why did they not vote for the amendment submitted by the honorable member for Yarra (Mr. Tudor)? Instead of doing that, the Government supporters—including the honorable member for Parkes (Mr. Marr), who was going to be one of the gallant band which was determined that Parliament should not close until a decision upon this matter was arrived at—voted against it.

Mr. BRENNAN.—The honorable member must admit that they were in a very awkward position.

Mr. LAVELLE.—I do admit it. Everybody knows it. The Government then submitted a further amendment to add to the motion the following words:—

This House approves of the statement made by the Prime Minister on Tuesday, 23rd November, regarding the basic wage to be paid to employees in the Public Service, and requests the Government forthwith to arrange for such amount to be paid as will be equitable and just alike to employees and the general public and within the practicable capabilities of the Commonwealth to bear: the payment of such basic wage to commence as from the 1st November, 1920.

That is the proposal which the honorable member for Parkes rushed across from Sydney to assist the Government to carry. If it is carried—as, apparently, it will be—it will mean that this question will be left in the hands of the Government, who will do nothing of any practical benefit to our public servants. Certainly, they will not give effect to the

findings of the Commission. Only the other day, the Prime Minister definitely stated that he would not agree to pay the basic wage recommended by the Commission. If the amendment which we are now considering be adopted, the question will be left entirely in the hands of the Government. Seeing the way in which they have failed to honour their promises in the past, we know how they will honour them in the future. A little while ago, when we were constantly pointing out to them that our public servants in New South Wales were being paid less than the basic wage of that State, they said that they would not recognise that basic wage. But now, because the New South Wales basic wage is less than the wage decided on by the Commonwealth Commission, the Prime Minister endeavours to convey the impression that the former is the amount which the Commonwealth will pay. If that was not recognised as a fair amount to pay two or three weeks ago, why does he now recognise it as a fair amount? He recognises it as a fair amount now, simply because it is less than the finding of his own Commission. What justification was there for appointing a Commission? What justification was there for putting this country to such an expense, if, simply because its findings are not acceptable to the Government, they are to be contemptuously tossed aside, and the Government left to fix a wage on their own account? What good purpose has been served by the Commission if its findings are not to be given effect to? If the Government and their supporters do not intend to give effect to the findings, it means that the expenditure on the Commission has been wasted, so far as the basic wage is concerned. In my opinion, however, the Commission serves one useful purpose. It shows to the workers, who to-day are not receiving the amount decided on by the Commission, that they are not paid sufficient to enable them to live at a reasonable standard of comfort.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—It did not need a Royal Commission to show them that!

Mr. LAVELLE.—From my painful experience of those workers who remain outside the industrial organizations, they needed something like this report, and this discussion, to impress on them that they are not receiving a living wage. They had no real conception what living means, in the true sense of the word. But

now those who, so far, have remained outside the organizations, may be expected to join, and agitate for an equivalent amount. If it were not for the agitation created by the public servants of Australia—if they had not inundated members of this House with telegrams—I have not the slightest doubt that the Government would have done nothing at all in the matter.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—If the public servants have not the spirit to ask for what they want, they do not deserve to get it.

Mr. LAVELLE.—That is what I say. To those honorable members who charge us, on this side, with making this a party question, I can only say that the same invitation that was sent to myself and the other members of the Labour party, was sent to every other member of the House, to attend the meeting at the Exhibition Building last night. At that meeting, I scanned the faces of those assembled in the body of the hall, and those on the platform, but I failed to see a representative of any other party, except the Labour party.

Mr. BELL.—Honorable members were in their places here.

Mr. LAVELLE.—Honorable members on that side, were in the Queen's Hall at a picture show, deliberately keeping the House from meeting, in order to block discussion on this question, until the Prime Minister could come from Sydney, and with his usual cunning get them out of the difficulty in which they found themselves. Honorable members opposite know that if it were not for the Prime Minister, they would always be floundering as they were yesterday. He has cunning, and, with his power to appeal to sectarian feelings, and the basest instincts of mankind, he is able to stir up class passions and hatreds, as he did to-day, when he seized upon the name of O'Connor in order to make out that the agitation over the basic wage is fomented by those who are desirous of disrupting the Empire, although O'Connor is a thick and thin supporter of the Nationalist party. His supporters, however, know that they can depend on his cunning, audacity and unscrupulousness to get them out of any awkward corner.

Mr. PARKER MOLONEY.—The trouble is that he did not get them out of the difficulty after all.

Mr. LAVELLE.—That is so; and, after all, he has only shown the workers the class of Government that Australia has to-day. I have said that I earnestly looked for some Nationalist supporter of the Government, or for some member of the Country party, at the meeting last night, thinking that, perhaps, as in Sodom and Gomorrah, there might be one good man ready to assist the public servants in their fight for justice. And I did see one, and only one, and he was slinking away in the distance, on the edge of the crowd, as if he were ashamed to be seen at such a gathering. The fact that not a single member opposite except that one accepted the invitation proves conclusively that the Government supporters, and they only, are making this a party question.

Mr. JOWETT.—How many does the honorable member say were at the meeting?

Mr. LAVELLE.—About 8,000.

Dr. EARLE PAGE.—It was 5,000 before dinner!

Mr. LAVELLE.—For the enlightenment of honorable members, I may say that there were 5,000 seated in the chairs, and at least from 3,000 to 5,000 standing up.

Mr. JOWETT.—That is 10,000.

Mr. LAVELLE.—Not desiring to exaggerate, I have placed the number at 8,000 in order to be within the mark. Although this exhibition on the part of the Government and their supporters would have been a surprise to me before I knew them so well as I do now, it is no surprise to find them voting to assist the Prime Minister to-day, as in the past, to break another of his election promises.

Dr. EARLE PAGE (Cowper) [9.11].—I do not care to give a silent vote on the amendment, the form of which I do not like. It expresses approval of the statement made by the Prime Minister in regard to the basic wage, and, personally, I do not at all approve of it. I regard his statement only as second in importance to the report of the Commission itself, and with almost as much consternation. The whole history of this Basic Wage Commission proves it to have been a most mischievous idea. It started as an election pledge, regardless of the fact that it could not be carried out without certain alterations in the Constitution. Now that the report has been

produced, it is being used entirely by the Opposition for purely party and political purposes. The Labour party desire to have this proposal carried willy nilly, without regard to consequences, simply because an election pledge was given, and despite the fact that the Chairman of the Royal Commission himself admits that to carry it out in its entirety would absolutely dislocate and destroy Australian industries. The position that has arisen is most serious. The question of providing a living wage for everybody in the community is one that should be absolutely beyond party, going down, as it does, to the very root of our national progress, and being one of the girders of the fabric of Australian society. It should be determined in a most impartial and detached manner. I regret that, in an off-hand and haphazard fashion, the Prime Minister and the Government are going to dispose of the question of the application of the principle to the public servants, simply as the result of this report, which bears internal evidence throughout of being ill-digested and out of harmony with the possibilities of Australian developments.

I have no hesitation in speaking in this way because no one can deny that, on every occasion on which I have spoken in this Chamber on the question of the payment of the public servants, I have insisted that they should be decently paid. In fact, I think I am one of the few members who have received a definite vote of thanks from Public Service organizations for the manner in which I have advocated payment for the members of the Service in accordance with what other people in the community are receiving. Whether I were in Parliament or out of it, I should always insist, and have always insisted, as far as was in my power, that men and women receive a fair return for their labour. But I believe in a proper adjustment of the whole problem. If the Government said, "This is the basic wage, and we must carry it out," and if at the same time they submitted a proposition whereby the whole of the Public Service was to be properly overlooked and supervised, and the incompetents, of whom there are many, weeded out, one could approve of their policy on this question. We must pay good wages to the Commonwealth Public Service, as is necessary in the case of every Public Service, or most of the good

men will leave, because they can make more money outside. The result of paying low wages in any Service is that only the incompetent hands or those who are tied up by financial and domestic burdens remain. What we need to do in the Public Service of the Commonwealth is to weed out incompetents, and pay decent wages to the good men who are left, giving them a sense of responsibility, and getting a proper idea of the true value of their work. I take it that the Government, in the business undertakings they are handling, are not to be regarded as a benevolent institution. They may pay old-age pensions and maternity bonuses, and in that respect act in a benevolent capacity; but when it is a question of getting value in the shape of work for money paid out to public servants, they should be as strict as any other business concern. Quite apart from this, I do not think a simple increase of wages to public servants, according to a report founded on evidence, such as we have had submitted to us and which inevitably raises all other wages, is a proper way to improve the general condition of the public servants, or, indeed, of the public at large. It is admitted in the report that it must make the condition of salaried men worse. I object to the whole process by which the various basic wages have been built up during the last twelve or fifteen years. It is said that Mr. Justice Powers in 1917 laid it down that these awards should be built upon scientific and humane principles, and arrived at only after securing all the authentic materials available. The construction of the report before us is not scientific, nor has it been built up on all the authentic materials which could have been, and ought to have been, obtained in the proper consideration of a subject of this kind, which reaches right down to the basis of Australian society.

Mr. GABB.—It is humane.

Dr. EARLE PAGE.—It is no more humane than it is humane to give a youngster lollies indiscriminately to suck. He is pleased for the time being, but the next day he has to see the doctor because something has gone wrong with the inside works.

Mr. GABB.—A very bad simile.

Dr. EARLE PAGE.—If the honorable member saw as many "kiddies" as I do after they have partaken of lollies *ad lib.*, he would understand the truth of

the simile. Mr. Piddington himself admits that to bring this wage into operation would inevitably increase the cost of living to everybody, and that in three months' time it would have to be increased by 30s., and in six months' time by another 30s. As the honorable member for Perth (Mr. Fowler) truly said this afternoon, "It would be like a dog chasing its own tail." Increases in wages are not the only means by which the general well-being of the community is to be built up. All that increases of wages are doing in Australia at the present time is to increase the prices of certain commodities—and those the manufactured commodities. The figures in regard to raw materials are instructive, as the following table will show:—

Description.	Present Values. Per lb.	1914 Values. Per lb.
<i>Skins.</i>		
F.X. sheep-skins ..	9d. to 10d.	12d. to 13d.
Medium crossbred ..	6d. to 7d.	10½d. to 10½d.
Coarse crossbred ..	3d. to 3½d.	8½d. to 9½d.
Pelts, crossbred, best ..	3d. to 4d.	
Pelts, merino ..	1d. to 2½d.	
Lambs ..	4d. to 6d.	8d. to 10½d.
<i>Hides.</i>		
Light calf ..	9d. to 10d.	9d. to 11d.
Heavy calf ..	6d. to 7d.	6d. to 7d.
Heavy hides ..	6d. upwards	7½d. upwards
Medium hides ..	5½d. to 8½d.	7½d. to 8½d.
Light hides ..	5d. to 7½d.	7d. to 8½d.
Kip hides ..	5½d. to 7½d.	7½d. to 8d.
<i>Wool.</i>		
Fine crossbred ..	16d. ..	14½d.
Medium crossbred ..	12d. ..	11½d.
Rough crossbred ..	5d. ..	7½d.

Light calf hides are lower than 10d. per lb. I know men who have been trying, during the last few days, to sell hides of that description down to 2d. a lb. Fine crossbred wool is quoted at 16d. per lb. now, but it is practically unsaleable at present. The same state of affairs is true of many of the products of Australia, of which our wealth consists. While these products have been lessening in value as compared with pre-war times, the wages that are being paid in the cities, and which must ultimately be paid in the country, if any workers are to be kept there at all, have advanced by leaps and bounds. They have gone up practically by 100 per cent. during the last six years. I am confident that at least 50 per cent.

of the increased prices of goods is due, not to any increase in the price of raw materials, but to the increase in wages. Thus, a vicious circle is being established. Wages are increased, the price of the manufactured article is increased, and the amount of commission paid for handling and selling it is increased, and so we go on, until we shall reach a condition in which, no matter how much money we pay, we shall be getting a much lower return in actual goods and comforts than in the old days when wages more nearly approximated to the price of the raw material. And under this condition of affairs we have a Commission appointed, because of an election promise by the Prime Minister, to go into the whole matter and ascertain what is a living wage. But we find no fundamental principle underlying the appointment of this Commission. The Prime Minister in this House gave us his definition of a basic wage. He said—

The basic wage is not a wage paid for work done in the sense that it is regarded as an adequate equivalent for the work done. The basic wage rests upon a principle long ago established—

I cannot find any record of where it has been established—

and very properly so, in this Commonwealth, that a wage must be paid which would enable a citizen to live in that standard of comfort fitting and proper for a progressive community.

Irrespective of whether that wage can be paid, as the further quotation shows—

This Commission did not concern itself, therefore, with the question whether, as a fact, the wage sufficient for a man, his wife, and three children to live at that standard of comfort could be paid.

We find scattered throughout the whole of the report of the Commission references to the fact that the question referred to it was not whether a certain wage could be paid, but what amount could at the present time be regarded as a living wage.

Mr. MAXWELL.—That is all they were asked to do.

Dr. EARLE PAGE.—Yes, but it only demonstrates the foolish basis upon which the whole thing was started. The question of what is a basic wage is open to a certain amount of debate, and we can only arrive at it by deciding what people may consider to be a reasonable amount of comfort.

Mr. MAXWELL.—Would the honorable member like to keep a wife and three children on a wage of £5 16s. per week?

Dr. EARLE PAGE.—I have no objection to the payment of a wage of £5 16s. per week if it is found to be a proper wage on a more democratic, scientific basis than apparently has been adopted by the Basic Wage Commission. My objection is not to the amount but to the unscientific method of determining that amount, which as soon as it is made makes it inadequate. Any inquiry into this matter without also going into the question of the number of hours during which an industry ought to be worked and the production in that industry is ridiculously futile. The essential requirement in fixing upon a basic wage is to ascertain what wage is necessary to keep the person who works and his dependants in perfect health, according to the standard of the community in which he lives. I do not say that £5 16s. is not a proper basic wage, or that £10 per week should not be paid. All I say is that the inquiry instituted by the Commission was not on a scientific basis, and did not go to the root of things. After months of inquiry the Commissioners have fixed upon what they regard as a fair basic wage, and their recommendation is brought before this Parliament where we are informed that if the wage is paid to all employees with or without children, the increased burden on the community will be, according to Mr. Piddington, £93,000,000. per annum, and according to Mr. Knibbs, £101,000,000. The Prime Minister, in dealing with this aspect of the question, said—

In 1918, the wealth produced in Australia was £298,000,000. The increased burden upon industries would amount to 31 per cent. Mr. Piddington assumes that the labour cost, as expressed in the terms of the value of the goods or commodities, amounts to 50 per cent. Thus the increased burden involved in the payment of this wage to all males would be 62 per cent.

It has been suggested that Mr. Piddington wrote his memorandum in five hours. If so, he must have had all his figures very handy.

Mr. TUDOR.—In a footnote attached to his memorandum Mr. Piddington says that he received a letter from the Prime

Minister at 5 o'clock, and the Prime Minister informs us that he received Mr. Piddington's reply at 9 o'clock.

Dr. EARLE PAGE.—Mr. Piddington says in his memorandum—

If it could be supposed that the whole of the additional £93,000,000 labour cost could be passed on to the community, the increase in prices would altogether outstrip the purchasing power of employees having a basic wage of £5 16s.

After months of inquiry a basic wage is fixed upon, and then the chairman of the Commission informs us that as soon as it is paid in industry generally the consequential higher prices of commodities will outstrip the extra money paid to the worker. How can any reasonable man view such a proposal? I noted the fact that when the Prime Minister was pointing this out, the honorable member for Barrier (Mr. Considine) asked whether a lunatic had produced this report.

Mr. GABB.—By the same argument a reduction of wages would mean a reduction in the cost of living, and, therefore, it would be advantageous to reduce wages.

Dr. EARLE PAGE.—I do not contend that. I argue that if you set out the work on a wrong basis, you are almost certain to arrive at a wrong result. Mr. Piddington goes on to say—

Of the £298,000,000 worth of commodities produced in 1918, £113,000,000 worth, or about 38 per cent., was exported. Whether the increased cost of 62 per cent. could be added to the prices asked for, the 38 per cent. of our products would depend upon world's prices, that is, upon outside competition with all countries in the markets of the world.

It is quite evident that we cannot pay increased wages in Australia in the production of goods we export unless the world's prices for the goods we export go higher. But we find that the world's prices have fallen enormously. In fact, many of our products are to-day quite unsaleable.

According to the Prime Minister—

Mr. Piddington says that he has not had time to go into details of individual export industries; but it seemed to him that as far as manufacturing industries for export were concerned, they would be ruined, and that in the case of other industries the application of a basic wage of £5 16s. 6d. would retard their development, and possibly prevent their continuance. Another result of addition to the cost of production of goods for domestic consumption, which represented 62 per cent. of

the total production, would be to so raise prices for such goods that all secondary industries would be liable to be ruined by importations unless the Tariff were substantially increased. . . . Mr. Piddington says that if effect is given to the basic wage the Tariff would be wholly inoperative to prevent the market from being flooded with cheaper goods from overseas. Consequently, we should have to have a higher Tariff.

I agree with the honorable member for Dampier (Mr. Gregory) that a most serious position would be created, and the responsibility for it rests entirely with the Government. It is certainly one upon which an honorable member should not be asked to give a decision just when the House is going into recess, and after an extended sitting.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—How does the honorable member propose to cast his vote?

Dr. EARLE PAGE.—I shall indicate before I sit down what I intend to do.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—We know what the honorable member intends to do.

Dr. EARLE PAGE.—I have not the gift of prophecy that some honorable members seem to possess. Mr. Piddington says that if effect were given to the basic wage he suggests the Tariff would be wholly inoperative to prevent the market being flooded with cheaper goods from overseas, and consequently we should be compelled to have a higher Tariff.

Mr. MAXWELL.—That is if family wages were paid to men without dependants.

Dr. EARLE PAGE.—The same applies in proportionate degree to the haphazard arrangement proposed by the Prime Minister. He has said that that would impose a burden of £28,000,000 on all industries. I should not object to industry being asked to carry that burden if it were found to be necessary, after proper examination. If it could be shown that our industries would stand it, that it would increase development and production and improve the physical condition of the people, I should be prepared to support it. There can be no doubt whatever that an improvement of the physical condition of the people will inevitably increase production. A healthy man who feels fit cannot remain idle long, and will not "go slow" on his job.

It must be clear from the statement of Mr. Piddington that if there were a general application of the basic wage recommended by the Commission, industries which have been built up in Australia

with very great difficulty would be ruined, and our export trade would be wiped out. Yet honorable members opposite wonder why we will not vote for their amendment to apply the Commission's basic wage immediately to the Public Service. If we did so, the effect would be immediately reflected in the demands made for increased remuneration by persons in outside employment. I have found, in my own district, that when the wages of Government employees have been raised, outside labour will not work for less. That sets the standard for the locality. The report of the Basic Wage Commission shows beyond question to every thinking man in Australia, whether worker or employer, whether a public servant or a civilian, the absolute futility of the methods we have adopted during the last twenty years for the settlement of industrial disputes. Has any honorable member ever heard of an Arbitration Court, by its awards, doing anything else but increase wages?

Mr. CONSIDINE.—Yes.

Dr. EARLE PAGE.—I have never read in any New South Wales report of an award reducing wages.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—Has the honorable member not heard that the first Arbitration Court established in New South Wales reduced the wages of wharf labourers, and that subsequently the employers met them and increased their wages?

Dr. EARLE PAGE.—I direct the attention of honorable members to the fluctuations in the prices of the products of primary industries. Butter may be 1s. a lb. to-day, and at another time 1s. 6d. per lb. Wheat may be 2s. 6d. per bushel to-day, and at another time 5s., and at still another time fall again to 2s. 6d. Hides may be 2s. per lb. to-day, and at another time 2d. per lb. And yet for the last twelve years every Arbitration Court award has raised wages, quite irrespective of these fluctuations in the market for primary productions. We keep on going up in a spiral, but our actual conditions are not improved. We shall reach a point at which our whole industrial fabric will topple over, and then we shall have, not high wages, but unemployment on every hand.

The question is whether we cannot deal with this problem in such a way as to prevent such a catastrophe. There is only one way in which to face it with any

hope of success, and that is by increased production. We must have the maximum production of the workers of this country—whether of hand or brain.

Mr. TUDOR.—How are the bootmakers to increase production, when the boot manufacturers close all their factories?

Mr. McWILLIAMS.—The price of boots does not come down.

Dr. EARLE PAGE.—I admit that the Government have singularly failed to deal with profiteering. Increased production is the only way in which we can expect to secure a fall in the price of boots or of anything else. As the honorable member for Melbourne (Dr. Ma- loney) has pointed out, Lord Leverhulme has said that there is only one way in which to bring about an improvement in the conditions of life all round, and it is by working dead machinery to the maximum and the human machine to the best physical advantage. What is necessary is that we should discover the best number of hours of work for a worker in any particular industry. That was Lord Leverhulme's plan for increased production, which must mean more comfort for every one. In my opinion, the whole basis of our industrial system in determining wages is wrong in this respect, that no constant point has been adopted as the basis for examination. The basis adopted for the report we now have under consideration seems to be the employers' view of the matter in the Harvester Case. That is a basis with which the employer was satisfied thirteen or fourteen years ago, and because he was satisfied it has been assumed that it must, therefore, be a fair basis to work from. As a matter of fact, it is a wrong basis entirely, and we must have some constant and stable basis upon which to work to get a result of any value to the worker. That can only be arrived at by a medical commission such as that which inquired into the health of munition workers in England. This problem which we have to solve is essentially a physiological problem.

Mr. CONSIDINE.—It is an economic problem.

Dr. EARLE PAGE.—But economics are essentially bound up with physiology. The fundamental basis of society must be the physical health of its members, and,

therefore, the first thing to find in arriving at a solution of this problem is the best number of hours of work in any given industry. Some industries can only work short hours, some longer hours. Rockchopping, for instance, must be always very limited in the number of hours worked. The work of feeding machines involving the continual repetition of the same work dulls the sensibilities of the operator, and men can work effectively at it only for a limited number of hours before their output diminishes, and it is not economical to continue. There are a variety of operations performed in the open air, at which men would really be better for working a longer number of hours than it is customary for them to do at the present time. Some effort should be made to discover the best number of hours of work in any industry that will produce the maximum output, and at the same time maintain the worker in the best physical condition. I mean the number of hours that will keep him in perfect health. By perfect health I mean the retention of that elasticity of mind and body that enables him to enjoy his recreation and permits his mental development after his work. It was found in England, Germany, and the United States during the war that if a worker worked a longer number of hours each day, and day after day, than his physical strength permitted—that is to say, if he exceeded his physiological standard—then, although he might follow that period of strain with a prolonged holiday, weeks and months might elapse before he could again equal the output of men who had not been subject to over-strain. The only way to find these things out is to go to work on a scientific basis. I will read the names of the personnel of the Commission on Health of Munition Workers, which dealt with this subject in England. Their reference of inquiry was not confined to the output of munitions, and to ascertaining whether that output could be increased, but it included an investigation as to the effect the national task would be likely to have on the health of those engaged. The Commission comprised Sir George Newman, M.D., Sir Thomas Barlow, F.R.S., Mr. Bellhouse, Professor Boycott, M.D., F.R.S., Mr. J. R. Clynes, M.P., Mr. E. J. Collis, M.B., Dr. W. M. Fletcher, M.D., F.R.S., Mr.

Leonard E. Hill, M.B., Mr. Sam Osborn, Miss R. E. Squire, and Mrs. H. J. Tennant. Those ladies were upon the Commission because that body was investigating women's work, among other phases. Every Arbitration Court should have a Commission appointed to act with the arbitrator to ascertain facts such as these, and to place their practical knowledge and experience at the disposal of the Court in a way that could admit of no refutation. The actual living wage may change with a rise and fall in prices, but the number of hours of work to insure perfect physical health is independent of these vagaries. It differs with occupation, climate, sex, &c., but for each occupation, sex, &c., a physiological standard can be determined which is the fundamental basis of the whole problem. One should be able to discover what is the average output to be expected from a worker in a given number of hours every day, if one could learn the best number of hours that ought to be worked in an industry, and could secure some definite knowledge concerning the total of production to be expected from that industry. If we determine these two constant factors for the few basic industries, we have a constant basis from which to argue and work and automatically regulate the rise and fall of wages in secondary industries. We go to all sorts of trouble to perfect dead machinery, but we go to no trouble to insure that the human machine shall do its best work. Because in Australia, we place no premium on skilled labour or science we hand over inquiries into all such matters to amateurs, and we ask them to give an opinion concerning what should be expected of the human machine. The man is greater than the machine; the only guarantee of effective labour is his individual health and his mental development. The final report of the Health of Munition Workers' Commission stated—

It is certain that, unless our industrial life is to be guided in the future by the application of physiological science to the details of its management, it cannot hope to maintain its position hereafter among some of its foreign rivals, who already in that respect have gained a present advantage. However, this is an ideal of the future.

At present, because in each State the people are living under haphazard systems, and a basic wage has been fixed by a local Tribunal on unscientific lines it is im-

perative that the Commonwealth Government should do something to bring its own servants at least up to the standard of the basic wage in each particular State, and I will support that. If, in the Public Service, we are going to start a system of wage payment according to the size of a man's family—which may possibly be a correct and a just system—it must be remembered that the method cannot be applied to employers generally without bringing about a serious result. It is introducing a new principle into industrial arrangements that deserves very full consideration. Men having no children, or only one or two, will receive preference of employment. Then, to prevent that, and to encourage the rearing of families, the Government will have to step in and subsidize employers, to insure the payment of commensurate wages to families employees. I would like to see this principle, which in itself is almost as far reaching as the subject of the basic wage, discussed at a stage of the session when it is likely to be debated on its merits. I condemn the Government, first for having, in a mischievous way, handed the problem of the basic wage over to a Commission which, in my opinion, was not competent to investigate it, and for having presented to Parliament and the people the findings of the Commission, knowing they cannot be put into operation except in a very small particular, and can only unsettle industry. And I further condemn the Government for having brought forward the subject-matter at a time when it cannot be considered as a question of such magnitude should be.

**Mr. MATHEWS** (Melbourne Ports) [9.49].—The only trouble with the report of the Basic Wage Commission is that, when it was presented at the head of the Government, it was found to be loaded. When the Prime Minister promised to create such a Commission, and to adopt its findings, he thought, no doubt, that it would be a body similar to other Commissions which, after much investigation, have presented some very ordinary suggestions and harmless ideas. But, to the dismay of the Government and its supporters, this Commission was in earnest, and it actually produced a correct record of the conditions and requirements of wage-earners in Australia to-day. What are the Government afraid

of? The Commission has fixed varying rates averaging approximately £5 16s. per week, and the Government and their supporters now say that such rates cannot be paid. It is an absurd stand to take, and the suggestion is in keeping with the general policy of the Conservative section of this chamber. As has already been pointed out by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Tudor), a similar statement was made when the basic wage was fixed at 42s. per week. It was said that Australia would be ruined, and now when a Royal Commission clothed with full powers to make a thorough investigation has come to the decision that £5 16s. 6d. per week is a living wage for a man, his wife, and three children, we are told that if it were paid, industries would be ruined, and that financial chaos would prevail. It is merely a matter of re-arrangement, and I believe that if the rates mentioned were adopted, it would be found within a month that they would be inadequate. The suggestion to reconsider the rates every three months is ridiculous, as it would only give the profiteering class a further opportunity of exploiting the workers, and making more money. The rates should be re-arranged every fortnight, and, although such a suggestion may seem ridiculous, I believe it is one that should be adopted. Honorable members opposite have said that, under our present system, it would be impossible to pay these rates, and if such is the case, it is an admission of Parliament's incapacity. Do honorable members infer that the Commission was bribed to come to such a decision? Are the members of that Commission brainless num-skulls, who, after obtaining all the necessary evidence, and making the fullest possible investigation, have made a recommendation which cannot be given effect to? If the Government admit their inability to govern the Commonwealth, it is time they made room for those who can. If honorable members opposite believe that it is beyond the power of any party to pay the rates set out in the Commission's report, our present social and economic system is at fault, and radical changes will have to be made. Honorable members know that it is useless to increase wages unless a check is placed on prices. The Royal Commission has set down an irreducible minimum of £5 16s. 6d. per week for Victoria. The Government have been in office for twelve

months, and although their supporters told the people, prior to the last election, that they would govern this country in the interests of the people, they have failed lamentably. The wage-earners were told to vote for the great National Party, because its policy was one that would be the means of improving the conditions of every member of the community, and some silly idiots believed them. I could mention six constituencies in Victoria in which the electors were hopelessly deluded. Although the basic wage rate for Victoria has been fixed at £5 16s. 6d., I believe the Government do not intend paying more than £4 4s., which means that they are going to ask a man who has a wife and three children to support to accept £1 12s. 6d. less than the Commission, which was specially appointed to make an investigation considers necessary. The workers of Australia have been waiting patiently for many months for a decision to be reached, and men have charged the workers' representatives on the Commission with delaying the publication of the report. The working men and women in Victoria are in a more serious position than those in New South Wales, where the Government have to a degree settled the question. When the New South Wales basic wage was fixed at £3 17s., the Victorian rate was about £2 8s., and when the New South Wales rate was increased to £4-5s., the Victorian basic wage was £3 2s. The workers in Victoria have been waiting for the decision of this Commission, and now it has been received, the Government say they cannot give effect to it. We are told by honorable members opposite that we are only in favor of the public servants receiving an increased basic rate, but that is incorrect. This Parliament can effectively control the wages of the public servants.

Mr. MAXWELL.—If we fix a basic wage for public servants, other workers will naturally demand a similar amount.

Mr. MATHEWS.—Of course they will, because they have been the worst paid section in the community. It is impracticable for a private employer to pay less than is paid in the Public Service. We deny the statement that this Parliament cannot assist the workers outside, as well as those in the Public Service. If we increase the price of commodities, wages must also be increased, and, as I have

said on a previous occasion, a daily wage of £1 is not too high, because it really requires that amount to enable a man with an average family to live in comfort. One hears on every hand of increasing rents, which are rising to the extent of 4s., 5s., and even 10s. a week. The Government guaranteed 5s. per bushel for the farmers' wheat at the railway sidings; but wheat is now 9s. per bushel. All other commodities have risen in price, and wages must be increased to meet the altered conditions. I doubt very much whether a discussion on the subject will have any effect; but it is the duty of honorable members to place their views before the people. I believe it would be in the interests of the public servants if they held stop-work meetings every day until their demands were conceded. I know there are many honorable members opposite who would welcome such an event, because they believe they would then have an opportunity of dealing with them.

Mr. WISE.—Why suggest it?

Mr. MATHEWS.—Because it is a weapon which has been used by industrial unions with great success during the last few years, and it would benefit the public servants if they adopted a similar course. I happened to be in Western Australia when the public servants of that State went on strike a few months ago. That strike, brief though it was, disorganized the whole State, and had it continued much longer would have brought about a condition of chaos. The position would be the same in the event of a strike of Commonwealth public servants. If the seamen or those engaged in the building or carrying trades go on strike, the effect is injurious to many of their fellow workers, but such occurrences open the eyes of the community to the real sore in our social system.

The Government must do something in this matter. I do not want to say that they are closing down for the Christmas vacation earlier than usual merely to evade the responsibility of dealing with the report of the Royal Commission on the Basic Wage, but it looks like it.

Mr. POYNTON.—Why not say so?

Mr. MATHEWS.—Then I will. We are closing down for the Christmas vacation earlier than we have done on any other occasion.

Mr. WISE.—We have been here for ten months.

Mr. MATHEWS.—I admit that we have had a long session, and that attendance in Parliament entails heavy work on Ministers, but we might very well have continued the sitting for another week in order to deal with a report for which the workers have been waiting for so many months. This report relates to the very life's blood of the wage-earning section of the community, and they expect us to deal with it at once. The Prime Minister this afternoon did not display the good temper that I should have shown had there been thrown at me the little present that he received a night or two ago. He dealt with this question in a way which, no doubt, was amusing to some of his supporters, but he might well have asked the House to sit next week in order that this question might be fully considered, and a definite decision arrived at. The public have not been taken by surprise. They have been expecting the fixing of a basic wage. Will any one say that it was thought that the Commission would recommend a basic wage involving an increase of only four or five shillings per week on the existing rate? I am sure that the Prime Minister had no such anticipations. He is too keen a student of economics to have expected anything of the kind.

Mr. POYNTON.—If the Prime Minister is as bad as you would have us believe, why is it that whenever there is any industrial trouble you people run to him to get you out of it?

Mr. MATHEWS.—Because he is the Prime Minister of Australia. If there is any industrial matter that comes within his jurisdiction, and concerning which my constituents complain, I shall not hesitate to bring it before him. Another point is that he has taken good care to clothe himself with more power than has any other man in Australia. He is, indeed, the only man in the Commonwealth with any power. The people have not yet recognised that fact. They gave him a new lease of power last December, and I shall continue to put before him every industrial grievance with which he has power to deal. It is my duty to do so, and it is his duty to listen to my representations.

I do not want to see any trouble over this matter—I am afraid that I am too often speaking of threatened trouble—but I am satisfied that the public servants of Australia are determined on this occasion to secure their rights. It is nonsense to

say that the country cannot afford to pay the basic wage. The Commonwealth can pay it, but it is useless to pay it unless at the same time the Government take steps to keep down the cost of living. Unless that is done, a re-adjustment will be necessary from time to time.

A word now as to the position of the womenfolk of the community. In dealing with the basic wage, I hope that the Government will not discriminate between married and single men, nor as between the sexes. A woman nowadays needs as much to live on as a man. We are told that the women want to dress too well. That may be a weakness on their part; but every man prefers to see a woman well dressed, rather than dressed in a dowdy fashion. In respect of clothing alone, apart from the cost of board and lodging, a single woman wants the same wage as a man.

Mr. POYNTON.—Does not the honorable member think that a man with a wife and family should have more than a single man?

Mr. MATHEWS.—I do not believe in differentiating in this regard between married and single men, for the reason that if the wage fixed for a single man is less than that for a married man, private employers will employ only single men. There are many ways by which a man with a family may be assisted without differentiating between his pay and that of a single man. The State in many ways can assist his children from their birth. The State should provide them with medical attention and medicine, and, where necessary, with nurses. It should also provide for the education of the children, from the primary school to the University. Not only should it provide them with free instruction, but with all school requisites, and if the child of a poor man has brains, and goes to the University, the State, where necessary, should provide that child with food and clothing. In the olden days, when a man paid £1 a week for his board and lodging, a woman had to pay only 10s. or 12s. per week. To-day it is not possible for a woman to get decent board and lodging for less than 30s. a week, and, in addition, she must keep herself in clothing and all the other necessaries. I do not want to labour the matter, but I trust sincerely that this question of sex in relation to the basic wage will not be dealt with now as it has been in the past, and

that further disabilities will not be laid upon women.

Mr. TUDOR.—It was laid down in 1901 that there should be equal pay for equal work.

Mr. MATHEWS.—This principle has been laid down, as the honorable member for Yarra points out; but in the Education Department we find women teachers in one town doing work for a certain wage, and male teachers in another town doing the same class of work for a higher rate of wage. Of course, if a woman cannot perform the work done by a man, she should not expect the same rate of pay; but it is the duty of the Government to see that every person in the community gets a fair living wage. It has been stated that the industries of the Commonwealth will not be able to pay this basic wage. What nonsense! If an industry is in that position, it is clear that the public are underpaying for its products. We have been told that many mines throughout the Commonwealth will have to close down if miners' wages are to be brought up to the standard fixed by this Basic Wage Commission. I should like to see many mines closed down, for I know it would be much better, from the point of view of health, if the men engaged in them were employed on the land, even if, after a few years' work there they turned round and voted not for the party that made it possible for them to go on the land, but for the Conservative section of the community. The statement that an industry cannot afford to pay the basic wage is nonsense. There was a time when the fellmongering industry was the lowest paid in Victoria; but when it was demonstrated that if the industry could not pay better wages it would have to go out of existence, those connected with it very soon found it possible to pay better wages. Take the case of the farm worker. If the effect of paying the basic wage to him will mean increased prices for farm products, well, it will be nothing new. Wheat, butter, and other products have already gone up in price, so that this will only mean another re-arrangement. But if we agree to pay the basic wage throughout the Commonwealth, and do not take prompt steps to put down profiteering, the basic wage will not be sufficient for

very long; there will have to be a re-arrangement about every month. Glad as I would be to see the Government placed in an awkward position by their refusal to give effect to this recommendation, because I am one of those to whom political victory is very sweet, I do not want to see them in any such difficulty at all. I would rather they adopted the basic wage, in order that the people might be in an improved position financially. I hope, therefore, that before this session closes something practical will be done.

Dr. MALONEY (Melbourne) [10.15].—This movement for the basic wage is another declaration of the war that is going on all over the world; but it is not based on scientific principles. I should like to see a wage fixed for the man and woman as husband and wife, and provision not for three children, but four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, or twelve children. If the basic wage is paid to the husband and wife, there could then be no question of differentiation between single and married men, because the single man, if he had any sense, would hope soon to find a good Australian girl to be his mate. It is the duty of the State to look after the child. For thirty years I have been endeavouring to persuade the powers that be to endow every woman with the right to go to the Government and claim a pension for her child. The elder Napoleon was the greatest friend of woman and child the world has ever seen. Under the *Code Napoleon* it is impossible for the husband to disinherit his wife or children. No child asks to come into the world, no child can come into the world unless the parents meet; every child is the future unit of the State, and every unit of the State has rights that neither parents nor the State can deprive it of. It has the right to claim proper food, shelter, clothing, in order to become a healthy adult. I want to see woman idealized, and to be able to claim, as her right, all these things for her child, as the future unit of the State. I am glad that Mr. Piddington has named 12s. as the sum which should be set aside for the upbringing of each child. What lesson is this for the Military Department in regard to their treatment of the children of deceased soldiers. What a lesson is it to that mean-spirited Treasurer of Victoria (Mr. McPherson), who says that children

can be brought up on 8s. per week. I wonder how he would like his own children brought up on that sum. According to Mr. Piddington's figures, parents with twelve children, and for some years they could all be under sixteen years of age, would get the basic wage of £4 per week, and the allowance of 12s. per week for each child would bring the total income to £11 4s. per week. It has been said that the country cannot afford to pay the amount involved by the adoption of the Basic Wage Commission's recommendation. Is it not a fact that in Germany, Italy, and Russia wages are nominally very much higher than in Australia? After all, although money in those countries may have depreciated, the real test is to be found in the amount of commodities that it can buy. A quarter of a century ago the public servants of this State regarded Labour and Democracy as something not to be touched with a 40-ft. pole, and I remember on one occasion, when speaking at an open-air meeting, telling them I expected to live to see the day when they would ask Labour unions to help them. That day has come. But will we be satisfied if public servants get this basic wage, and outside employees do not? By no means. In the old days the public servants of Victoria drew £2 in pensions for every £1 drawn by public servants in New South Wales, with £50,000 to the bad. Victoria at that time paid her public servants in pensions more than was paid in all the other States of Australia put together. I have always stood for one pension, and that pension only—a pension that should be available to every man and woman on reaching a certain age. What I ask for the public servants I shall not cease from asking for every man and every woman employed outside the Public Service. I was glad to hear the honorable member for Melbourne Ports (Mr. Mathews) say that no difference should be made on account of sex. As far back as 1901, this Parliament, in dealing with the Public Service Bill, affirmed the principle of equal pay for equal work. There is not a member of this House who would permit us to go back to the barbarous times of a comparatively few years ago. Mr. Harrison Ord, who was Secretary to the Labour Department of Victoria, once said that certain manufacturers and others

used to pay their girls 2s. 6d. a week, giving the money on the Saturday morning, and collecting it from them again on the Monday morning. They were actually allowed to use it in that interval. When they asked for more they were "sacked," and others taken on in their places. In 1898, 4,554 women were employed in Victoria at an average wage of 10s. 9d. a week, and of them 3,813 averaged only 8s. 7d. a week. The average of 10s. 9d. a week was due to the inclusion of the comparatively high salaries paid to heads of Departments. That brand of infamy known as sweating was supported by the laws of Victoria; but to-day the people are rising in their power. I recognise that the position has its difficulties for Ministers. I do not care who else may be making this a party question, I am not doing so. It may be difficult on the figures given by Mr. Knibbs to pay this basic wage. Employers will dismiss their hands, and close their works. But how easy would the position of Ministers be if they could say, "This Commission recommends a certain basic wage. We are bound to accept its recommendation, and unless within sixty days a certain number of citizens lodge a petition objecting to its payment, it will become the law of the land." There would then be behind it the 900,000 or so householders who pay the whole of the taxation of Australia. With the referendum and initiative in our Constitution the people would have the last voice in saying what should be done. Under such an arrangement Ministers would be in a much happier position. As it is, the alliance of the public servants of Australia with the Labour party may cause them to lose a number of seats. The conditions of our society are a reflex of those of Central Europe; but, thank goodness, we are 12,000 miles away from the centre of the disturbance. A German friend of mine, in sending five sovereigns to Germany, can get 900 marks for them, whereas formerly he got only 100 marks, so greatly has the purchasing power of money declined there. This Parliament must prevent the unjust increasing of prices. We should send to gaol those who charge unfairly. In 1812, Napoleon, in his Criminal Code, enacted — I quote from

memory a free translation—that if any man, or body of men, came together for the unjust raising of prices, the penalty should be 20,000 francs and—not "or"—six months' imprisonment; but if the increase of prices affected food, such as bread or wine, the penalty should be doubled.

Evidently, he saw the malign influence of Trusts and Combines. The sooner we face this difficult question the better it will be for all of us. It was in 1898 one of the most aristocratic surgeons that England has ever had—I refer to Mr. Jonathan Hutchison—suggested that England should nationalize its bread. Why should not the Commonwealth Government take the "staff of life," pay a fair price to the farmers who grow the corn, give a fair price for the gristling at the mill, and let the national bakeries hand it over the counter free, with a charge made for delivery? It would not cost them one-tenth of the amount which they have expended in connexion with the war. I am now speaking on behalf of the most helpless section of the community—the children. They have a right to proper food, clothing, and shelter. What is the greatest asset which a country can possess? Is it its gold, its houses, or its land? Certainly not. It is a healthy population, consisting of well-educated men and women, who are well able to discharge their citizen duties. Does it not appeal to every honorable member that we must control prices? I can recall the case of only two or three companies in Australia which have not increased their reserve funds and their dividends since the outbreak of war. Anybody can verify what I am saying by consulting the columns of the *Bulletin*. Honorable members might do worse than study the question of finance as it is set out in that publication. I am glad that the public servants recognise that the workers of Australia are their peers. If they are in need of assistance, I am satisfied that the unions of this country will help them so long as they will act reciprocally. I do not doubt that, at the recent elections, some of the swell public servants of this country were swayed by the placard which was used by the National party, and which was headed "Ryan and Ruin." How can a man help the name that he bears? It

is a mere accident of birth. Yet, I am convinced that at the present moment it is a handicap for one to bear a name which comes from the land where the shamrock grows. Loving my country as an Australian, I do not deny the right of persons born in other lands to become permanent residents of the Commonwealth. To me, there is only one country, and that is Australia. It comes before everything else. I want every person who is an Australian, either by birth or adoption, to stand up for it. Let us set an example to the whole world by showing that we can handle our country and that we can do at least as much as is accomplished by intelligent creatures of a lower order than ourselves. When I look upon the ant and the bee, I ask myself how it is that, never in the nest of the ant or the hive of the bee, do the young suffer if the necessities of life exist there. Can we say the same of our fellow human beings? Has it not been stated that 20,000,000 persons have perished of starvation in India? That is equivalent to four persons for every man, woman and child in Australia. Have we not been told that there is no child under four years of age in Servia, and in parts of Bulgaria, and that although the Russians are endeavouring to help the children of their own country, the latter are still in want. Let us set an example to the world, by showing that every human being here—fashioned as he is in God's likeness—shall have a chance to live a decent life as the Deity intended.

Mr. BRENNAN (Batman) [10.39].—My enemies will be pleased, and my friends will be resigned to learn that I have limited my address upon this proposal to ten minutes. After that, I shall bid the House and you, sir, an affectionate farewell, with an expression of hope that you will enjoy a happy Christmas and a merry New Year, and that we at least—whatever may happen to unfortunate public servants to whom the Government have refused their just rights—may go home to enjoy that basic wage which we have secured for ourselves for the period of the Christmas vacation, and for so long thereafter as a tolerant public will suffer us to enjoy it. I rise to join very shortly in protesting against the Government breach of faith in respect to the non-payment of the basic wage, in the first place to

the members of our Public Service, and afterwards, as we had hoped, to the general community. As an Opposition all we can do is to register our protest against the repeated breaches of faith on behalf of the Government in matters of the kind. The promise was made under solemn circumstances; it was not a casual observation, but a direct statement by the Prime Minister himself, the head of the Government, as part of the Ministerial policy. The promise was that effective machinery would be created for the purpose of ascertaining a basic wage payable to members of the Public Service, and that the findings of the Commission would be given effect to.

We are not now beginning in this matter; we should by now have reaped the fruits of our labours in this regard. The Commission has deliberated for twelve months, and the Public Service and the public generally have waited expectantly for the result of the Commission's deliberations. It is not surprising to-day, when this determination has been arrived at, that the greatest impatience and indignation should be manifested on finding that Parliament is about to go into recess without any hope of the promise being given effect to. The amendment moved by the Treasurer (Sir Joseph Cook) does not advance the matter. It is a series of platitudes which binds the Government to nothing, and promises nothing, though, indeed, if it did, we should not be much further advanced. It is curious, by the way, that the Treasurer should move an amendment as a subordinate Minister, on the motion submitted by his own Prime Minister. It is said that we cannot pay this minimum wage. I remind honorable members that the basic wage does not necessarily mean fair compensation for work done; all it means is the minimum on which a person or family can decently live. I suggest to the Government that it is their duty, in the case of married men with three children, to definitely promise the immediate payment of what has been declared to be the least that is necessary to enable them to live under decent conditions. That is not too much to ask as a first instalment; and on that sure foundation, they might then, if they chose to regard the obvious intention of the Commission, extend some measure of justice to the others. We have deprived the Public Service of the Arbitration Court, and are proposing to

set up a new Tribunal, though when that new Tribunal will come into operation I do not know. We have granted large increases in salaries to members of the Professional Division, and to men enjoying high salaries in the Public Service, and we have not, it is perfectly true, forgotten ourselves. In these circumstances, for a responsible Minister to declare that the Commonwealth is not equal to paying to its public servants what a Royal Commission, after sitting for twelve months, declares to be the bedrock salary, is an insult to the Commonwealth as a whole, as well as to our common sense.

In this connexion I venture to put in a special word for the claims of the women workers in the Public Service. I am in receipt of two communications, the first of which is—

#### EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK.

1. Of every ten women in the Service it is safe to say that at least eight will have others to support besides themselves—if not all their official life, during some portion of it—and those usually adults, who cost more to maintain than children, in many cases old people or invalids who require medical attention. This is specially true since the war, there being many cases of shell-shocked or gassed or otherwise injured members of the family, whose pensions only partly support them.

2. It is fundamentally dishonest to allow two persons to sit side by side, doing the same work, involving the same mental and physical wear and tear, and pay one more than the other. To pay for sex or for marriage is as illogical as to pay according to the colour of one's hair, or the size of one's shoe, or any other personal idiosyncrasy. Work only should earn money.

3. A man's children are liabilities for a certain number of years, after that they become assets, and lighten his burdens, whereas a woman has nothing to look forward to but the result of her own exertions; if either should be paid more, she should be, because she is more heavily handicapped.

4. Most women in the Service have renounced marriage because they have responsibilities towards their families, incurred, in most cases, because their brothers have married and left the maintenance of the old home in the hands of their sisters, who should surely be paid as much to maintain the old home as their brothers are to maintain the new one.

5. If men are to be paid because they are married, then it is not right to pay the same rate to a man with one child as to a man with ten children, to a widower with neither wife nor child as to a man with a wife and three children. If it is fair to differentiate between individuals at all, it should be carried out fairly in all its details.

6. The first Federal Public Service Act gave a living wage to "all officers" of the Service. We should never again have been referred to as male and female officers, but all alike designated for all time "officers of the Public Service." Surely it is a retrograde movement to bring back distinctions that existed last century.

7. We ask nothing excessive—simply the 1920 equivalent of our 1901 salaries.

I do not entirely indorse the statement in that circular that most women in the Service have renounced marriage. That is doubtless true in many cases, but I say quite candidly and seriously, speaking more especially of the Telephone Branch, of which I have a good deal of knowledge, that we have in the Commonwealth Public Service a splendid body of women workers. I am very glad to believe, as I do, that a large proportion of them will in due time, by their ability and attractiveness, enter on the higher plane of matrimonial life. The second communication is—

We would be very grateful if, when the basic wage for Federal servants is being discussed in Parliament next week, you would speak in the interests of the *women* officers. At present we have women on a salary of approximately £2 9s. per week. This is totally inadequate for these times of high prices.

In Mr. Starke's recent awards, he made the basic wage for women £135, and for single men £162. This is a violation of the Government's principle—equal pay for equal work. £135—approximately £2 12s. per week—is a grinding wage. Board in a respectable locality comes to 30s. a week; washing, 3s.; lunch and train fares, 6s. 3d; total, £1 19s. 3d. This leaves about 14s. to cover insurance, income tax, lodge fees, and clothes. Old age and holidays cannot be provided for.

I indorse those claims on behalf of the women, and I hope that when the Government begin to look with a juster eye on the claims of the Public Service generally, they will not forget their special claims. There is no just excuse for the Government failing to give effect to the findings of their own Commission, and they should pay, at least, the minimum wage, and thus set an example to employers outside.

Question—That the words proposed to be added be so added (Sir Joseph Cook's amendment)—put. The House divided.

Ayes	..	..	26
Noes	..	..	14
—			—
Majority	..	..	12

## AYES.

Atkinson, L.	Hill, W. C.
Bell, G. J.	Hughes, W. M.
Bowden, E. K.	Lister, J. H.
Bruce, S. M.	Mackay, G. H.
Cameron, D. C.	Marr, C. W. C.
Chanter, J. M.	Maxwell, G. A.
Cook, Sir Joseph	Poynton, A.
Corser, E. B. C.	Prowse, J. H.
Fleming, W. M.	Smith, Laird
Francis, F. H.	Wise, G. H.
Greene, W. M.	
Gregory, H.	
Groom, L. E.	
Higgs, W. G.	

Tellers:  
Burchell, R. J.  
Story, W. H.

## NOES.

Brennan, F.	Page, Dr. Earle
Considine, M. P.	Ryan, T. J.
Cunningham, L. L.	Stewart, P. G.
Gabb, J. M.	Tudor, F. G.

Tellers:  
Mathews, J.  
West, J. E.

## PAIRS.

Bayley, J. G.	Page, James
Best, Sir Robert	Maloney, Dr.
Fowler, J. M.	Fenton, J. E.
Lamond, Hector	Mahony, W. G.
Livingston, J.	McDonald, C.
Marks, W. M.	Watkins, D.
Foster, Richard	McGrath, D. C.
Rodgers, A. S.	Makin, N. J. O.
Ryrie, Sir Granville	Riley, E.
Chapman, Austin	Charlton, M.
Cook, Robert	Catts, J. H.
Blundell, R. P.	Lazzarini, H. P.

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Question—That the motion, as amended, be agreed to—put. The House divided.

Ayes	..	..	26
Noes	..	..	14

Majority	..	..	12
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## AYES.

Atkinson, L.	Hill, W. C.
Bell, G. J.	Hughes, W. M.
Bowden, E. K.	Lister, J. H.
Bruce, S. M.	Mackay, G. H.
Cameron, D. C.	Marr, C. W. C.
Chanter, J. M.	Maxwell, G. A.
Cook, Sir Joseph	Poynton, A.
Corser, E. B. C.	Prowse, J. H.
Fleming, W. M.	Smith, Laird
Francis, F. H.	Wise, G. H.
Greene, W. M.	
Gregory, H.	
Groom, L. E.	
Higgs, W. G.	

Tellers:  
Burchell, R. J.  
Story, W. H.

## NOES.

Brennan, F.	Page, Dr. Earle
Considine, M. P.	Ryan, T. J.
Cunningham, L. L.	Stewart, P. G.
Gabb, J. M.	Tudor, F. G.
Jowett, E.	
Lavelle, T. J.	Tellers:
McWilliams, W. J.	Mathews, J.
Moloney, Parker	West, J. E.

## PAIRS.

Bayley, J. G.	Page, James
Best, Sir Robert	Maloney, Dr.
Fowler, J. M.	Fenton, J. E.
Lamond, Hector	Mahony, W. G.
Livingston, J.	McDonald, C.
Marks, W. M.	Watkins, D.
Foster, Richard	McGrath, D. C.
Rodgers, A. S.	Makin, N. J. O.
Ryrie, Sir Granville	Riley, E.
Chapman, Austin	Charlton, M.
Cook, Robert	Catts, J. H.
Blundell, R. P.	Lazzarini, H. P.

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

## Resolved—

That the papers be printed, and this House approves the statement made by the Prime Minister on Tuesday, 23rd November, regarding the basic wage to be paid to employees in the Commonwealth Public Service, and requests the Government forthwith to arrange for such amount to be paid as will be equitable and just, alike to employees and the general public, and within the practical capabilities of the Commonwealth to defray—Payment of such basic wage to be made as from 1st November, 1920.

## SHIPBUILDING CONTRACT.

## INQUIRY BY PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE.

**Mr. GREGORY** (Dampier) [11.1].—I move—

That the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works have leave to continue during recess, its investigations into the matter of the shipbuilding contract of Messrs. Kidman and Mayoh referred to it on the 29th day of October, 1920, and to present an interim report thereon to the Governor-General.

As the Public Works Committee Act provides that all reports of the Committee must be presented to Parliament, I, as Chairman of that Committee, have always declined to present reports direct to the Government; but this is a matter of grave urgency which the Public Works Committee was asked to consider and report upon as speedily as possible. Therefore, seeing that it cannot conclude this inquiry for at least another fortnight, I have much pleasure in moving this motion in order to obtain the consent of the House to my proposal to facilitate the wishes of the Government by presenting the report

of the Committee direct to the Governor-General without waiting until Parliament next assembles.

**Mr. TUDOR** (Yarra) [11.4].—I understand that the honorable member for Dalley (Mr. Mahony), who is absent, and whose interests I wish to protect in his absence, has raised the objection that the presentation of this report of the Public Works Committee to the Governor-General may deprive the House of the opportunity of discussing it. Am I to understand that, although the report of the Committee is presented to the Governor-General, it will be laid on the table of the House in the ordinary way when it meets again, and honorable members will have the opportunity of discussing it?

**Mr. GREGORY**.—Most decidedly.

**Mr. TUDOR**.—I am anxious to know, also, whether the Government will proceed to take action upon the report of the Committee, and pay over the amount which the Committee may decide is a fair payment to be made to Messrs. Kidman and Mayoh for the two vessels they contracted to build for the Commonwealth Government, or will the Government wait until the House has an opportunity of discussing the question?

**Mr. GREGORY**.—The second portion of the report will not be presented until Parliament meets.

**Mr. TUDOR**.—I understand that these two vessels were to be sold to Messrs. Burns, Philp, and Company for £90,000, and that this firm went back on its offer, in consequence of which Messrs. Kidman and Mayoh want the Commonwealth to take over the ships at a price.

**Mr. HUGHES**.—We are obliged to take over the boats. It is a contract.

**Mr. TUDOR**.—I understand that we have to take them over at a price, but the Public Works Committee is to decide whether Messrs. Kidman and Mayoh have fulfilled their contract. What I wish to know is whether, upon the receipt of the report from the Committee, the Government will finalize the matter before the House has the opportunity of dealing with it.

**Mr. HUGHES** (Bendigo—Prime Minister) [11.6].—I presume that the Government will finalize the matter immediately upon the receipt of the report from the Public Works Committee, otherwise it would be useless for the Committee to proceed any further in the matter. The ships must go to sea. If the claim of

Messrs. Kidman and Mayoh is not borne out by the contract, we must exercise our discretion, and leave the firm to that remedy which the law provides. It always has had its remedy at law, but when we put forward the suggestion that the matter might be settled by arbitration, both parties agreed that the Public Works Committee should act as arbitrators. When they come to a decision, the money must be paid over.

Mr. TUDOR.—Will the first report of the Public Works Committee decide the amount?

Mr. GREGORY.—No.

Mr. TUDOR.—I shall vote for the motion if the report does not decide upon the amount to be paid.

Mr. HUGHES.—I presume that the first report would say what is a fair amount to be paid, and whether the ships have been faithfully built, according to the specifications laid down in the contract. That is the very matter which has been submitted to the Public Works Committee by both parties; otherwise the point would have been argued out at law. If the matter had gone to law, whatever amount the Court fixed upon would have to be paid.

Mr. McWILLIAMS (Franklin) [11.8].—I was one of those who opposed the submission of this matter to the Public Works Committee. Seeing that a law suit was threatening, and that the contestants have agreed that the Public Works Committee should act as arbitrators, the procedure proposed by the honorable member for Dampier (Mr. Gregory) is, I think, the correct one to adopt in the circumstances, but this House ought to have an opportunity of dealing with the report as soon as we meet again.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

#### SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT.

Mr. HUGHES (Bendigo—Prime Minister) [11.10].—I move—

That the House, at its rising, adjourn until a date and hour to be fixed by Mr. Speaker, which time of meeting shall be notified to each member by telegram or letter.

The House will probably be asked to meet in the first or second week in March.

Mr. TUDOR.—That would be before Easter, which falls on the 26th March.

Mr. HUGHES.—Then the House will meet on the first sitting day after Easter. It would be of no use to meet shortly before Easter, merely to adjourn again.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

#### LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

Motion (by Mr. HUGHES) agreed to—

That leave of absence be given to every member of the House of Representatives from the determination of this sitting of the House to the date of its next sitting.

#### DEFENCE DEPARTMENT.

APPLICATION OF BASIC WAGE TO ARMY PAY CORPS—REGULATION OF AIR TRAFFIC—INSURANCE OF JUNIOR OFFICERS—COMPULSORY TRAINING.

Mr. GROOM, *by leave* (for Sir GRANVILLE RYRIE).—The honorable member for West Sydney desired to ask to-day—

Will the members of the Australian Army Pay Corps be entitled to increments arising out of the fixing of a basic wage for Government employees?

The answer supplied is—

The suggestion contained in the honorable member's question will be considered.

Mr. GROOM, *by leave* (for Sir GRANVILLE RYRIE).—The honorable member for Wentworth (Mr. Marks) has this question on the paper—

To ask the Minister representing the Minister for Defence.—Now that the Commonwealth has passed the necessary legislation for regulating air traffic, will the Government make an urgent request to the various State Governments to pass the necessary legislation to hand over the air control to the Commonwealth in terms of the arrangement entered into at the last Premiers' Conference.

The answer supplied is—

A draft State Bill has been submitted by the Premier of New South Wales, on behalf of the Conference of Premiers, and this has been accepted by the Commonwealth Government. It is understood that the measure will be placed before the State Legislatures with the least avoidable delay.

Mr. GROOM, *by leave* (for Sir GRANVILLE RYRIE).—The honorable member for Eden-Monaro (Mr. Austin Chapman) asks—

1. Is it a fact that some of the returned junior military officers who had their life

insurance premiums paid by the Government during war service have been called upon to refund the amount of the premiums paid?

2. Is it the intention of the Government, having paid these premiums, to insist on a refund of the same?

The answer supplied is—

1 and 2. Shortly after the outbreak of war, the Government decided, in the case of permanent military officers, that premiums on life insurance policies taken out prior to the war would be paid by the Commonwealth, but premiums would not be paid on policies effected after the commencement of the war. In a few cases, however, the premiums in respect of policies taken out after the outbreak of the war were inadvertently paid by the Department, and in these cases a refund is being obtained from the officers concerned.

**Mr. GROOM**, by leave (for Sir GRANVILLE RYRIE).—On the 23rd November the honorable member for Hunter (Mr. Charlton) referred to two matters relating to compulsory military training. The first complaint is in regard to the unsuitable time for prosecution of lads employed in the coal mining industry. This Department has no control over the State Law authorities, the days for prosecutions are arranged to suit the local magistrate, but instructions will immediately be issued to the Commandant, 2nd Military District, that Area Officers in future must consult mine managers and the magistrate, and endeavour to arrange that cases for failure to render personal services are taken on days which are not working days for the collieries. At the same time, full inquiries will be made in regard to this matter by an officer specially detailed to visit Sydney next week. The second complaint is in regard to the non-supply of uniforms and boots. Mr. Charlton will remember that the reason for this was given some time ago. Special instructions were issued some time ago that discretion was to be exercised by Area Officers in dealing with lads who were drilling in their plain clothes. If Mr. Charlton will supply the name of the boy who was prosecuted the case will be fully inquired into. Every care is exercised to prevent friction. Mr. Charlton will be advised of the result of inquiries immediately a report of the officer mentioned in the previous paragraph is received.

### ORDER OF BUSINESS.

Motion (by Mr. CONSIDINE) negatived—

That all the intervening business on the business-paper be postponed to enable notice of motion number 18 to be considered.

**Mr. CONSIDINE**.—We called for a division.

**Mr. SPEAKER**.—The honorable member is too late. The motion has been negatived.

**Mr. CONSIDINE**.—I thought that honorable members had withdrawn their opposition to the motion, and that is why I remained silent.

**Mr. SPEAKER**.—I understood that the call for a division was withdrawn, and I put the motion a second time, and it was negatived on the voices.

### ADJOURNMENT.

PRODUCTION OF PAPERS—RETIREMENT OF CLERK ASSISTANT—VALEDICTORY.

Motion (by Mr. HUGHES) proposed—That the House do now adjourn.

**Mr. CONSIDINE**.—I rise to a point of order. Am I not to be given a division on my motion?

**Mr. SPEAKER**.—The honorable member is too late. He should have called for a division.

**Mr. CONSIDINE**.—We did call for a division.

**Mr. SPEAKER**.—I was informed that the call for a division was withdrawn, and I again put the question, and declared it negatived on the voices.

**Mr. PROWSE**.—May I ask that the House will now consider general business Order of the Day No. 9?

**Mr. SPEAKER**.—Order! The question is that the House do now adjourn.

**Mr. GREGORY** (Dampier) [11.15].—I want to refer to the decision of the Government with regard to the last motion submitted from the Chair. I am satisfied with the work of the Post and Telegraphic Department, but, if there is anything likely to create suspicion in the public mind, it is the refusal to consider a motion couched in the terms of the motion submitted by the honorable member for Barrier (Mr. Considine), in which he asks for the production of papers dealing with what he describes as “the forged telegram incident.” The Government, in my opinion, would have been well advised to have allowed the motion to pass.

**Mr. SPEAKER**.—Order! The honorable member cannot debate a decision of the House.

**Mr. GREGORY.**—I was speaking on the motion for the adjournment of the House. I shall say only that there is nothing more likely to create suspicion in the public mind than a refusal on the part of the Administration to allow departmental papers to be produced.

**Mr. SPEAKER.**—Order!

**Mr. WISE** (Gippsland—Postmaster-General) [11.17].—Referring to the remarks made by the honorable member for Dampier—

**Mr. SPEAKER.**—Order! The honorable member will not be in order in continuing that discussion.

**Mr. WISE.**—The whole matter was discussed on the 17th November.

**Mr. SPEAKER.**—I wish to take advantage of this opportunity, if honorable members will permit me, before putting the motion, to say a word or two.

I desire to inform honorable members that this is the last occasion, in all probability, on which Mr. Woollard, the Clerk Assistant, will officiate in this Chamber, it being that gentleman's intention to retire from his position in February next, when he will have reached the retiring age.

In making this announcement, I may state that Mr. Woollard joined the Victorian Public Service on the 1st May, 1878, over 42 years ago, and became an officer of the Victorian Legislative Council in 1893, in which year he was appointed Clerk of the Records and Usher of that House.

At the inauguration of the Commonwealth Parliament in 1901, he was appointed Serjeant-at-Arms and Clerk of Committees of this House. In 1917 he was promoted to be Clerk Assistant.

I wish to take this opportunity of expressing regret that Parliament will, by the retirement of Mr. Woollard, lose the services of one of its most valuable and capable officers, whose urbanity and courtesy, allied to his efficient performance of the responsible duties entailed by his office are, I think, recognised and appreciated by honorable members generally.

**HONORABLE MEMBERS.**—Hear, hear!

**Mr. SPEAKER.**—I am sure I am only expressing the unanimous wish of honorable members when I say I hope he will have many more years of life yet before him to enjoy his well-earned rest from

active duty—duty which, in the case of officers of this Chamber, involves not only work of a very exacting nature, but often extremely long hours of attendance.

**HONORABLE MEMBERS.**—Hear, hear!

**Mr. TUDOR** (Yarra) [11.19].—May I say, on behalf of honorable members on this side, many of whom have been in this House for a good many years with Mr. Woollard, that the sentiments you have expressed ably represent our feelings towards him, as well as to the other officers of this House. I desire to add that not only to you but to the Chairman of Committees, and to all the officers of the House, members of this party are grateful for the way in which they have been treated. In conclusion, I wish you, Mr. Speaker, and them, a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

**Mr. McWILLIAMS** (Franklin) [11.21].

—It must have come as a shock to practically every member of the House to learn that we are about to lose our friend, Mr. Woollard, and especially that his retirement is due to the reasons mentioned by you, Mr. Speaker. The Clerk-Assistant appears to be good for at least another ten years of solid and faithful work. Every honorable member who has come into contact with that officer—I care not on what side of the House he may sit—has found Mr. Woollard ready and willing to give him every possible assistance. He has been indeed a personal friend to honorable members. I deeply regret that he is retiring from his position. I, for one, shall miss his advice, and the assistance which he has always so cheerfully placed at the service of honorable members. I join with you, sir, and with the honorable member for Yarra (Mr. Tudor) in hoping that Mr. Woollard may long enjoy his well-earned rest.

May I take the opportunity, on behalf of the party which I have the honour to lead, to thank you, Mr. Speaker, and the officers of the House generally, for the very kind and ab'e assistance given to us at all times. May I say, as one who this session has made his advent as leader of a party, that I thank members of the Ministry, and honorable members on all sides of the House for the courtesy they have extended to our new party. We have done our best to live up to the principles which we have advocated.

**Mr. BRENNAN** (Batman) [11.23].

—I regret to obtrude a matter of business at this stage, but, since it is urgent, I

trust that I may be excused for so doing. Certain members of the Public Service desire that I should call attention in this place to a circular which they have received, which is regarded as objectionable. Personally, I think that it is objectionable. It has been issued by the Acting Deputy Postmaster-General, apparently in the ordinary departmental routine way, and its contents are as follow:—

In connexion with the awards recently made by the Deputy President of the Arbitration Court for the granting of new allowances to operate as from the 1st July, 1920, to meet increased cost of living, I have to state it is necessary that all widowers and married officers submit evidence of marriage, and it is accordingly requested that immediate steps be taken by you to obtain from all widowers and married officers in your branch their marriage certificates for notation by the Department. The certificates should be forwarded under confidential cover to the Staff Section, accompanied by a list of names and designations of the officers concerned, and special care must be taken to see that the documents are duly delivered. The certificates will be returned immediately after notation.

Officers between twenty-one and twenty-five years of age who have already produced marriage certificates are not required to again submit them.

This matter must be treated as urgent.

(Signed) JAMES MASON.

I think that the word of officers as to whether or not they are married should be accepted, and that they should not be required to produce to any officer of the Department documents which are of a peculiarly confidential and personal nature.

Mr. BOWDEN.—A declaration of the date of marriage would do equally well.

Mr. BRENNAN.—As the honorable member says, a declaration, if solemn proof is required in this matter, should be sufficient. Everybody knows that a marriage certificate contains a number of personal details which it may not be desired to disclose to departmental officers, or, for that matter, to any one else. The production of these certificates is surely not necessary, and the practice should be discontinued. Lastly, the circular should be withdrawn.

As I am upon my feet, and although I do not represent any party in particular, seeing that the party speaks through my honoured Leader the honorable member for Yarra (Mr. Tudor), I desire to express the regret which we feel at the prospect of losing our friend, Mr. Woollard.

We have had a most strenuous session, and, notwithstanding what has been

stated of us, I am sure we have all tried to do our duty. We have had to submit to your judgment, Mr. Speaker, in all things; and if I have broken the Standing Orders, and have had to be called to order by you, I ask you to accept my solemn assurance that, though you may have a faithful record of the number of times I have broken the Standing Orders, you can have no idea at all of the number of times I have resisted my desire to do so. I hope I shall get full credit for that. Although we have all sought for perfection, none of us, I fear, has attained it, unless, perhaps, you yourself, sir, may provide the sole exception. Honorable members have to submit to your judgment, while you, of course, have also to submit to your own judgment; and that, perhaps, will account for your success.

The Prime Minister has been guilty of introducing an inharmonious note to this House, but I must say that he has done so very rarely; indeed, only when even he has come into the Chamber. The Treasurer has been less fortunate, but more industrious, and so I congratulate him, too. In spite of the unkind things my opponents have said about me—I hope not sincerely—I have nothing but the best of goodwill towards them. I trust that they will mend their ways in the future, and I will undertake to do my best to amend my own. I hope we shall all experience a very happy Christmas and that we and all the citizens of this country shall enjoy a prosperous New Year. As for ourselves, much as we may differ in politics, I trust that we shall all meet again, at any rate, until the next elections.

Mr. HUGHES (Bendigo—Prime Minister and Attorney-General) [11.28].—I have not seen or heard of the circular to which the honorable member for Batman (Mr. Brennan) has just referred, but I shall make inquiries and consider what the honorable member has said.

I wish to say, on behalf of the Government and of honorable members on this side of the House, how very much we regret that the Clerk Assistant (Mr. Woollard) is about to leave us. The news comes as a very great surprise to me. If I were compelled to choose whom I would rather have removed from amongst us, I should certainly not select Mr. Woollard.

I have known that gentleman for twenty years, and I think that I can say, with the honorable member for Yarra (Mr. Tudor), that it would be inconceivable if any man should say that he had ever had any cause of complaint concerning Mr. Woollard. A more courteous and more obliging gentleman and a more competent officer never lived. I speak feelingly. It will be a source of sincere regret to all who have known him for so long to see his place vacant. I hope that all manner of good things will come to him, and that in his leisure he will be able to recall some of those inspiring scenes in regard to which he has been an onlooker, and in which, no doubt, he has thanked Almighty God that he was not a participator.

I wish to tender, on behalf of this Parliament—and here, surely, I may speak for all—my very hearty thanks to all the officers of the House. I need hardly say, sir, that we include you when thanking others for the manner in which they have carried out their duties. It has been a trying session, and when I look on those patient and enduring men who record what we say, or what we endeavour to say, I think that if there is to be a special reservation high above the Seventh Heaven, they will surely inherit it. Their duties are most trying. The Principal Parliamentary Reporter (Mr. Friend), who has been with us from the beginning, has done his work in such a way that, looking back over a period of twenty years, not one of us in that time has ever had occasion to complain.

AN HONORABLE MEMBER.—Hear, Hear!

MR. HUGHES.—Mr. Friend has organized and leads a most competent staff, and, with the experience I have had in other parliaments, I say deliberately that his is the most efficient *Hansard* staff in Australia. Indeed, I think it will compare more than favorably with any in the world. To the messengers and other officers I tender my thanks. They, too, play their part, and strive to do their duty. We wish them well. I wish the officers and staff of the House every good thing for the coming Christmas season, and in the New Year I hope I may, without completely blighting or withering my friends on the other side, wish them well also. We have our little differences. Where would we be

without them? The interjections of the honorable member for Batman (Mr. Brennan), which I do not always catch, are a source of unending delight to me, and when I offered him an hour or so ago £10 to assassinate two members of this Chamber who persisted in prolonging this sitting he absolutely refused to undertake the business. And yet there are carping spirits who say lawyers are an avaricious and unscrupulous tribe! We have all had a trying time. We have endeavoured, each one in our own way, to do our duty, and it will be in the fullness of time for the people to judge each one of us. I wish every member of the House the compliments of the season. I wish every officer the same. May I express the earnest hope that we all meet again, our health and spirits benefited through the temporary respite from our labours. I trust that we shall return to duty prepared to make the Tariff, amongst other things, a Tariff at which every nation will pluck out their eyes with envy, and that we shall be able to say that we have solved one of the most difficult problems on earth.

MR. SPEAKER (Hon. Sir Elliot Johnson).—On my own behalf, and on behalf of the officers, the messengers, and other employees of the House, I desire to express my appreciation of the remarks which have been made by the right honorable the Prime Minister (Mr. Hughes), the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Tudor), the honorable member for Franklin (Mr. McWilliams), and the honorable member for Batman (Mr. Brennan). I desire to tender to the officers, and those associated with this establishment, my thanks for their untiring attention during the recent session. I would also like to offer to honorable members my congratulations on the conclusion of their labours for the time being, and on their retirement to a well-earned rest. I also express the hope that when they return to their duties next year they will come fortified with renewed strength and vigour, prepared to carry out the important work which still lies ahead of them. I take this opportunity of wishing to one and all a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

HONORABLE MEMBERS.—Hear, hear!  
Question resolved in the affirmative.

# Members of the House of Representatives.

*Speaker*—The Honorable Sir Elliot Johnson, K.C.M.G.

*Chairman of Committees*—The Honorable John Moore Chanter.

Anstey, Frank ..	Bourke (V.)	Jackson, David Sydney .. Bass (T.)
<sup>2</sup> Atkinson, Llewelyn ..	Wilmot (T.)	Johnson, Hon. Sir Elliot, Lang, (N.S.W.)
<sup>7</sup> Bamford, Hon. Frederick Herbert (Q.)		K.C.M.G.
William		Jowett, Edmund .. Grampians (V.)
Bayley, James Garfield ..	Oxley (Q.)	<sup>5</sup> Kerby, Edwin Thomas Ballarat (V.)
Bell, George John, C.M.G.,	Darwin (T.)	John
D.S.O.		Lamond, Hector .. Illawarra (N.S.W.)
Best, Hon. Sir Robert Kooyong (V.)		Lavelle, Thomas James .. Calare (N.S.W.)
Wallace, K.C.M.G.		Lazzarini, Hubert Peter .. Werriwa (N.S.W.)
Blakeley, Arthur ..	Darling (N.S.W.)	Lister, John Henry .. Corio (V.)
Blundell, Hon. Reginald Adelaide (S.A.)		Livingston, John .. Barker (S.A.)
Pole		Mackay, George Hugh .. Lillely (Q.)
Bowden, Eric Kendall ..	Nepean (N.S.W.)	<sup>8</sup> Mahon, Hon. Hugh .. Kalgoorlie (W.A.)
Brennan, Frank ..	Batman (V.)	Mahony, William George .. Daley (N.S.W.)
Bruce, Stanley, Melbourne, Flinders (V.)		Makin, Norman John Hindmarsh (S.A.)
M.C.		Oswald
Burchell, Reginald John, Fremantle (W.A.)		Maloney, William .. Melbourne (V.)
M.C.		Marks, Walter Moffitt .. Wentworth (N.S.W.)
Cameron, Donald Charles, Brisbane (Q.)		Marr, Charles William Parkes (N.S.W.)
C.M.G., D.S.O.		Clanan, D.S.O., M.C.
Catts, James Howard ..	Cook (N.S.W.)	Mathews, James .. Melbourne Ports (V.)
Chanter, Hon. John Riverina (N.S.W.)		Maxwell, George Arnot .. Fawkner (V.)
Moore		<sup>1</sup> McDonald, Hon. Charles .. Kennedy (Q.)
Chapman, Hon. Austin ..	Eden-Monaro	<sup>6</sup> McGrath, David Charles .. Ballarat (V.)
		McWilliams, William James Franklin (T.)
<sup>3</sup> Charlton, Matthew† ..	Hunter (N.S.W.)	Moloney, Parker John .. Hume (N.S.W.)
<sup>4</sup> Consideine, Michael Patrick Barrier (N.S.W.)		Nicholls, Samuel Robert .. Macquarie (N.S.W.)
Cook, Right Hon. Sir Parramatta (N.S.W.)		Page, Earle Christmas Cowper (N.S.W.)
Joseph, P.C., G.C.M.G.		Grafton
Cook, Robert ..	Indi (V.)	Page, Hon. James .. Maranoa (Q.)
Corser, Edward Bernard Wide Bay (Q.)		Poynton, Hon. Alexander Grey (S.A.)
Cresset		O.B.E.
Cunningham, Lucien Gwydir (N.S.W.)		Prowse, John Henry .. Swan (W.A.)
Lawrence		Riley, Edward ..
Fenton, James Edward ..	Maribyrnong (V.)	South Sydney
<sup>3</sup> Fleming, William Mont Robertson (N.S.W.)	gomerie	
Foster, Hon. Richard Wakefield (S.A.)		(N.S.W.)
Witty		Rodgers, Hon. Arthur Stan- Wannon (V.)
<sup>2</sup> Fowler, Hon. James Perth (W.A.)		islaus
Mackinnon		Ryan, Hon. Thomas West Sydney
Francis, Frederick Henry Henty (V.)		Joseph, K.C.
Gabb, Joel Moses ..	Angas (S.A.)	
Gibson, William Gerrard Corangamite (V.)		Ryrie, Sir Granville de North Sydney
Greene, Hon. Walter Richmond (N.S.W.)		Laune, K.C.M.G., C.B.
Massy		
Gregory, Hon. Henry ..	Dampier (W.A.)	Smith, Hon. William Denison (T.)
Groom, Hon. Littleton Darling Downs (Q.)		Henry Laird
Ernest		Stewart, Percy Gerald .. Wimmera (V.)
Hay, Alexander ..	New England	Story, William Harrison .. Boothby (S.A.)
		<sup>3</sup> Tudor, Hon. Frank Gwynne Yarra (V.)
Higgs, Hon. William Guy Capricornia (Q.)		Watkins, Hon. David .. Newcastle (N.S.W.)
Hill, William Caldwell ..	Echuca (V.)	Watt, Right Hon. William Balaclava (V.)
Hughes, Right Hon. William Bendigo (V.)		Alexander, P.C.
Morris, P.C., K.C.		West, John Edward .. East Sydney

1. Sworn 27th February, 1920.—2. Sworn 3rd March, 1920.—3. Appointed Temporary Chairman of Committees, 4th March, 1920.—4. Made affirmation, 5th March, 1920.—5. Election declared void, 2nd June, 1920.—  
† Sworn 11th May, 1920.—6. Elected 10th July, 1920. Sworn 21st July, 1920.—7. Appointed Temporary Chairman of Committees, 13th May, 1920.—8. Expelled and seat declared vacant, 12th November, 1920.

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Principal Parliamentary Reporter.

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